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LTTE political wing leader SP Thamichelvan and Sudha Master at press conference on 23 January in Kilinochchi (above); in the Vanni, generation of refugee children affected by war will benefit from the current peace process (below)

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-Voltaire

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Peace Process in Progress

During the last few weeks, the Norwegian special delegation has been engaged in a punishing schedule of shuttle diplomacy in peace making travelling, more frequently than one would have normally expected, between Colombo and London having discussions with the Government and the LTTE through its chief negotiator. It would appear that these deliberations have been positive and productive. All the indications are that the Norwegian facilitated peace process in Sri Lanka is progressing fast and remarkably well. So much so, there is almost universal optimism that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would be signed sooner than later.

What is more significant is the sudden and substantial transformation of the ground situation within Sri Lanka. Not only have the guns gone silent and bombs are not exploding and the mutual cessation of hostilities declared by the Government and the LTTE is holding.

Draconian restrictions on travel and transportation of goods essential for the day to day lives of the civilian population of the war-torn areas have been removed. These restrictions resulting in enormous hardship to the common people have been in place since the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force at the end of March and the re-commencement of armed hostilities between government forces and the LTTE in June 1990.

The Government has announced that no approval from the Ministry of Defence will be required hereafter by Sri Lankan citizens travelling to Jaffna. Any Diplomatic Officials, stationed in Sri Lanka will not require permission from MOD to travel to the North. Any Sri Lankan, Sri Lankan, Diplomat or anyone visiting uncleared areas (that are under the control of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) will do so at his/her own risk. The Ministry also has scrapped the requirement of obtaining its clearance to buy air tickets to travel to Jaffna.

Another major restriction to be removed is the ban on fishing within a security zone in the north where fishermen hitherto had no access on the ground that Tamil Tigers would infiltrate and carry out attacks on security forces there. Now, fishermen of the north are to be allowed to fish using only non-mechanised boats up to a half-a-kilometre from the beach daily from 4.30 am until 6.00 pm. along the coastal belt between Thondamanaru and Point Pedro.

Passengers using the ship between the north-eastern Trincomalee harbour to the northern Point Pedro harbour are allowed to travel without any security clearance. The northern Point Pedro jetty in Jaffna will operate till 10 p.m. enabling an increase in the quantum of supplies that can be unloaded from ships.

It is also reported that the army has completed the de-mining of the A9 highway from Kandy to Jaffna for it to be used by civilians when it is opened on 15 February. The road is said to have been cleared according to the requirements of the International Committee of the Red Cross and would be ready for transportation and use from the 15 February. The LTTE too have been working simultaneously to de-mine areas under their control and are reported to have removed a large number of anti-personnel mines.

All these rather sweeping and substantial measures taken within a relatively short time that ensure the transport of goods and free movement of people in areas of the north of the island, whether they be under the control of government forces or the LTTE, will and must benefit the mass of the ordinary people who have been subjected to unbearable hardship all these years.

Casting a dark shadow over these positive developments and posing a serious question mark over the entire peace process is the widely reported allegations of abductions, extortion and conscription of children attributed to the LTTE. In the face of these reports being authenticated and articulated with well documented details by reputed institutions such as the Amnesty International, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), BBC and other independent organisations and journalists, it is futile and counter-productive to dismiss them as the malevolent work of those who want to "scuttle the peace process." What is required and productive would be to desist from committing these gross violations of human rights, and allow the ordinary common people to enjoy the fruits of the positive developments that are unfolding since the cessation of hostilities between the government and the LTTE. In the ultimate analysis, peace in its true sense does not mean an absence of war between rival combatants, whatever cause they may respectively represent, but a situation in which people, both as groups and as individuals, can live in dignity without their fundamental human and democratic rights being wantonly violated.

One hopes, despite the dark shadow to which reference has been made, the MoU which is said to be in the final stages of fine-tuning will be signed by the government and the LTTE leading to fruitful negotiations on substantive political issues eventually fulfilling the universal expectation of peace returning for the first time in many years to this beleaguered island and its people.

News and Comment

By Colombo Correspondent

Removal of Restrictions

There is an unmistakable feeling of déjà vu in the current peace process, going back to what took place in 1994/95. Once again, the North and especially the Vanni gets more goods and Northern farmers are looking at ways of selling their produce in the South. But there is a much larger flow of goods and people to and from the North than the last time, and there are hopes of the main routes linking the peninsula to the mainland being opened too. No Ministry of Defence (MoD) permission is required for travel to the North. Anyone could go to the uncleared areas, at their own risk.

According to the MoD statement, no approval from Ministry of Defence will be required hereafter by Sri Lankan citizens travelling to Jaffna. Only non- Sri Lankans should seek permission from the MoD to visit the North. However, any non- Sri Lankan who is recommended in writing after scrutiny for travel to Jaffna by Sri Lankan Ambassador/High Commissioner abroad will be permitted access to the Jaffna without MoD approval. Any Diplomatic Officials, stationed in Sri Lanka will not require permission from MoD to travel to the North. However, any Sri Lankan, non-Sri Lankan, Diplomat or anyone visiting uncleared areas (that are under the control of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) will do so at his/her own risk. The ministry has also scrapped the requirement of obtaining its clearance to buy air tickets to travel to the government-held northern town of Jaffna.

Another major restriction due to be removed was a ban on fishing within a security zone in northern Sri Lanka where fishermen hitherto had no access. The Defence Ministry said it was allowing fishermen of the north to catch fish along the coastal belt between Thondamanaru and Point Pedro. Fishermen will be allowed to use only non-mechanised boats and catch fish up to a half kilometre from the beach daily from 4.30 am until 6.00 pm. On Sundays they will be allowed up to one and half kilometres from the beach. A considerable section of the population in northern Sri Lanka depend on fishing for their livelihood, but have been denied access due to escalated fighting during the past several years.

In addition, the government has decided to permit passengers using the ship between the north eastern port city harbour of Trincomalee to the northern Point Pedro harbour to travel without any security clearance. Earlier civilians had to follow cumbersome procedures to get security clearance before travelling. In a related development the government has decided to operate the northern Point Pedro jetty in Jaffna till 10 p.m. enabling an increase in the quantum of supplies that can be unloaded from ships.

The army is scheduled to complete the de-mining of the A9 highway from Kandy to Jaffna by 14 February for the road to be used by civilians when it is opened for such use from the following day. Military spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said that the road is being cleared according to the requirements of the International Committee of the Red Cross and would be ready for transportation and use from the 15th. The LTTE too are working simultaneously to de-mine areas under their control and are reported to have removed a large number of anti personnel mines also at Omanthai in the Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE too in a statement said that the highway would be cleared and ready for opening on February 15.

Peace Process

All these sweeping measures have been undertaken amid optimistic reports concerning the progress in the current peace process facilitated by Norway whose special delegation led by Foreign Minister Mr. Vidar Helgesen have has been busy travelling between Colombo and London conducting a flurry of negotiations among government personalities in Colombo and the London-based LTTE's advisor and chief negotiator Mr Anton Balasingham in effort at finalising the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be entered into between the government and the LTTE.

All this has led to greater expectations of success in the peace process this time round, as the LTTE extended its unilateral ceasefire by one month and the Government reciprocated with a cessation of hostilities for the same period, ending February 24. It is also the date being touted by the media for signing of the MoU leading to a more formal mutually agreed ceasefire for at least one year, and with foreign monitors or observers of its implementation too. All things considered there appears to be too much optimism about the MoU being signed in February.

According to reliable reports much has been agreed to between the two parties, especially an open-ended mutually agreed ceasefire. Its monitoring is to be by a team of five including two representative each from the Government and LTTE, an one appointed by Norway, possibly from another Scandinavian country. The LTTE is believed to have agreed not to carry out any attacks on civilians or civilian targets during the period, while the Government has reportedly agreed to an LTTE request that its unarmed members be allowed to enter areas held by the security forces to carry out political work, a matter causing much concern among the Army & Police. The Government, under heavy pressure from the Navy and Air Force has so far not agreed to the LTTE's request that vessels suspected of carrying weapons or other materiel for military use should not be searched and attacked when necessary, on the high seas.

In a tactical move, the MoU is not expected to make any mention of the "traditional homeland of the Tamils" or refer to the LTTE's demand for a separate state. The MoU is limited to creating a durable cessation of hostilities aimed at starting peace talks, which some say could start by June, but is more likely to begin much later, if and when they do. It is also understood that the issue of lifting the proscription of the LTTE by Sri Lanka has been sidestepped for the time being.

New Problems

While there was much optimism after this last visit of the Norwegians and their departure to London for what appeared to be final talks on the MoU, a new problem appears to have cropped up with reports that the LTTE was insisting that President Kumaratunga should also be a signatory to the MoU. It had been thought as leader of the newly elected government, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would sign the MoU on behalf of the government and Velupillai

Pirabaharan, would sign as leader of the LTTE. It is now said that if the President does not sign, then the LTTE leader too will not sign it, but authorize a person of lower rank to do so. The Norwegian facilitators are reportedly of the view that it would be best to have the signatures of both the President and Prime Minister and that of the LTTE leader, in order to make the MoU a more comprehensive and authoritative document. Talks on this aspect are in progress and there is cause to fear that this demand could lead to some delay and in the entire process.

While everyone waits with eager expectation for a more lasting ceasefire, there are some awkward issues being raised and problems being created that seem to delay the whole process. Orchestrated protests by fishermen in the North and East, apparently with LTTE support have been staged demanding unrestricted fishing rights, a demand that is strongly resisted by the Navy. While any ceasefire may hold on land, the Navy is stressing the need for it to search any vessel in the high seas that is suspected of carrying arms for the LTTE. The Air Force wants the rights to attack such vessels. This is one aspect not yet cleared in the draft MoU. The protests carried out by the fishermen in Jaffna prevented the Government Agent, Jaffna, from hoisting the National Flag at the Jaffna Secretariat on Independence Day - February 4. This provoked much criticism of LTTE tactics in the Sinhala press. The protest campaign was suspended on February 11.

Conscription and Extortion

Another problem that has come to figure prominently is the well documented reports of LTTE cadres indulging in abductions, extortion and conscripting children to its armed ranks, particularly in the east of island. These have provoked widespread coverage, concern and criticism in the media both locally and internationally. Muslims in the East have staged protest demonstrations against reported abduction of fishermen and extortion demands. Reports have come from local and foreign journalists and civic leaders of people in the Batticaloa District fleeing through the jungles to get to the Batticaloa town area held by Government troops to escape the LTTE's recruitment of children. The University Teachers Human Rights - Jaffna (UTHR-J) and Amnesty International have issued well-documented reports giving graphic details of these activities.

On 1 February, the BBC correspondent, Francis Harrison reported: "Most people in the east are too scared to say anything publicly. But it is clear the local rebel commanders have started coming into government-controlled areas for recruitment. They are taking advantage of the current ceasefire to move around in Batticaloa district, visiting families and demanding that they give at least one child to the movement. Community leaders say the Tamil Tigers are forcibly conscripting young boys and girls who look fit enough to fight from families who had previously fled rebel territory, precisely to avoid such an eventuality.

"There are also reports throughout the east of Sri Lanka of increased extortion by the rebels, sometimes of sums up to the equivalent of $1,000. Local people say the rebels are now demanding that teachers and government officials pay 12% of their salary as an unofficial tax, as opposed to five percent previously. In one town in Trincomalee district, shops and offices closed in protest at what they said was increased extortion by the Tamil Tigers," the BBC report said.

Following reports of child recruitment from their field workers in the East, Colin Glennie, of the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) said, "We have had reports that children are still forcibly being taken and even during the ceasefire period, a lot of pressure is being put on children to join the LTTE. Reports indicate there is psychological pressure to join the LTTE while a few cases of physical abductions were also reported. Older people are being taken forcibly." Glennie further said that Unicef was making representation to the LTTE directly to adhere to the commitment it made to the UN's Special Representative, Olara Otunu in May 1998 to refrain from recruiting child combatants. It appeared that the LTTE was violating its pledge. He added that after the 1998 pledge, the LTTE put up banners and posters claiming there would be no child recruitment, but these appeared to be largely slogans and the abuse of children was continuing.

N.Raviraj, Jaffna district MP of the Tamil National Alliance and the former Mayor of Jaffna, told the BBC that political parties should publicly appeal to the LTTE to stop abduction and forcible recruitment of Tamil youth as it may disrupt the Norwegian brokered peace process, and that it was not in the interest of the peace process and the confidence building measures if the Tamil Tigers were forcibly conscripting the children and youth from North-East.

A statement attributed to President Kumaratunga said, "The President of Sri Lanka is deeply concerned regarding reports that the LTTE is continuing the large-scale forcible recruitment of children."

Bishop of Mannar, the Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph, stated that the Catholic Church vehemently condemned any attempt by the LTTE to recruit children below 16 years for military activities.

LTTE Rejects Allegations

The LTTE for its part angrily rejected the allegations and accused the originators and purveyors of these reports of attempting to "scuttle the peace process". "Corrupts elements in the Sri Lanka army and paramilitary groups operating with it are making covert attempts in the east to scuttle the peace negotiations between the Tigers and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government", said Mr. Karikalan, the deputy leader of the political wing of the Liberation Tigers, addressing a press conference at Kokkaddicholai in the eastern district of Batticaloa.

"In this context the LTTE would like to underscore the fact that it was our military resistance that ultimately impelled the Sri Lankan State to begin peace talks with us. None one would have been talking about peace for the Tamil people today if we didn't have the military power to withstand the massive SLA operation against the LTTE in April last year" Karikalan said.

Asked about reports of forcible conscription of children, Karikalan said, "Although no one has complained recently to the ICRC or Sri Lanka's human rights commission that we have forcefully conscripted anybody, it is still our wish to see that we are not maligned further by reports and rumours that our organisation is forcing youth to join." Questioned about the alleged harassment of Muslim people in the east Mr.Karikalan said that the LTTE wants to maintain friendly and harmonious relationship with the Muslim people, and the LTTE will fight for their political rights also.

Mr. Anton Balasingham from London rejected the accusation and said that President Kumaratunga was attempting create controversy and apprehensions with the intention of undermining the

ongoing Norwegian peace initiative. He accused President Kumaratunga of "deliberately distorting facts to slander the LTTE with the ultimate objective of scuttling the peace process."

Mr. Balasingham said that the LTTE was now actively recruiting young men and women above seventeen years of age to expand the movement's political and administrative wings. He said that amid intense efforts by the Norwegian government to advance the peace process, the movement had to prepare for the inevitable political and administrative demands that it can expect to face.

Pointing out that the 100,000 strong Sri Lanka Army is also engaged in substantial recruitment efforts at present, along with the Navy and Air Force, Mr. Balasingham said that the LTTE's military section was also recruiting volunteers "to ensure the prevailing balance of forces is not altered disadvantageously."

"This recruitment by both sides at present does not in any way undermine the spirit of the unilateral cessations of hostilities being observed by the LTTE and the Sri Lanka armed forces," he said.

A guarantee from the LTTE on safeguarding rights of Tamil civilians in northeast Sri Lanka is to be incorporated in a proposed ceasefire agreement. In answer to questions from journalists, Minister of Constitutional Affairs and cabinet spokesman, Prof. G.L. Peiris, said at a press conference on 7 February that the Government had conveyed to the LTTE through Norway, which is facilitating the peace process, its concern at reports of child conscription, extortion, abductions and killings by the group since the present truce began last Christmas. Mr. Peiris said this was one of the "priority issues" being discussed for incorporation into the final Memorandum of Understanding between the two sides. Another matter being discussed for the ceasefire was the security of members or sympathisers of non-LTTE Tamil groups, who have been constant targets of the LTTE, he said.

Rauff to Prabha

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem read out a letter he had sent LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to coincide with the Hindu festival of Thaipongal on January 14 where he complained that the Muslims living in the country's eastern province were subjected to fear and large-scale extortion at the hands of LTTE cadres. The letter called for a public announcement of the LTTE's stand on the Muslims living in the east, and said otherwise "the Muslims would not be able to break away from the siege mentality of having to pay ransom for survival". Hakeem said that the eastern province was "as much the homeland of the Muslims as it is of the Tamils".

In his letter written in the Tamil language and addressing the LTTE leader as 'Brother Prabhakaran' and 'Leader Prabhakaran', the Muslim Congress leader has urged him to stop extortion, abduction, the setting up of LTTE camps in Muslim villages, conscription of Muslim youth to the LTTE, avenging Muslims serving in government forces and also to recognise the SLMC as the voice of the Muslims. Hakeem urged Prabhakaran to enter into a dialogue to reach a political solution to the problems of the two communities "that speak the same (Tamil) language.

Cohabitation

The President has reiterated her support for the Government's peace initiative, which she described as a continuation of what she had begun. She said so at the independence day celebrations, where for the first time since independence in 1948, the ceremonies had an elected Executive President - the Head of State as Chief Guest and a Prime Minister from a different party that controls Parliament as Guest of Honour. Both declared the same sentiments about the need to work hard for peace. She praised the new government for quickly taking steps to re-engage the LTTE in a peace process, which was initiated by "my previous government". "The election has provided a historic opportunity for the two major political parties of Sri Lanka now both in government, through the presidency and the cabinet to evolve new systems of constructive cohabitation and collective action for the resolution of the conflict," she said.

It was another example of the working of political "co-habitation" to which the Sri Lankan State has been forced into by the will of the people. So far it appears to be working, although not without its problems.

The travails of cohabitation

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has scotched all speculation about the much talked about a move to impeach President Kumaratunga During a three-hour meeting with the President at the President's House on 30 January, the Prime Minister told her that neither he nor his party had any intention to promote such a move. Ministers Karu Jayasuriya and K N Choksy were associated with the PM at the discussions with the President.

The meeting took place reportedly to iron out outstanding problems that were beginning to strain the two month old UNF government forced to cohabit with the President leading the opposition Peoples Alliance. The intention was to work out a system of constructive cohabitation between the government and the President. It would appear that the PM's assurance on the impeachment issue was given to the President when she directly asked PM as to what his position was in the context of some UNF hardliners and influential media men being engaged in a campaign to oust the President. The President at the discussions also reportedly raised the sustained and continuous attacks on the Presidential Security Division (PSD) which provides security to the President. and alleged criminal charges against the head of the PSD, Mr. Nihal Karunaratne, The PM denied any responsibility for these attacks and even agreed to look into the possibility of not pressing with the charges against Mr Karunaratne. However, on the latter the Attorney General when asked said the matter was already before the courts and nothing could be done. The PSD chief has since surrendered to court and is now enlarged on bail.Although the Prime Minister had this cordial discussion with the President, and sought to allay her worries, leading members of the UNF said the Government was aware that the President could dissolve Parliament at a time of her choosing after one-year elapses from December 5, 2001. Therefore, they would bring in a motion to impeach her shortly before this one-year period ended. The catch is that if a motion of impeachment is before Parliament, the President loses her right to dissolve it, till after the entire proceedings on the motion are over, and this could take at least two years. So, it seems that although it appears that "co-habitation" is working well on the peace front, the President's Executive Powers are steadily being challenged successfully by the UNF. At least three of the five new Cabinet ministers being sworn in are strong advocates of the impeachment of the President. Also, the President has been reluctantly compelled to agree to swear in her arch foe, Minister S. B.

Dissanayake, as Minister in charge of the "Samurdhi" Welfare Movement. She refused to swear him for this subject on the first occasion when the Prime Minister presented his Cabinet in December last year, on grounds that there were allegations of bribery against him being investigated. Now that file has been closed and the President has no cause for refusal.

The Prime Minister's hopes of getting15 to 20 members from the People's Alliance to cross over to its side in Parliament supporting the peace moves appear to have now dissolved. Seven new Cabinet Ministers, who are close to the Prime Minister, are to be sworn in from among those who have so far held ministerial positions of non-Cabinet rank, in the 63-member rank of ministers. Of this seven new Cabinet Ministries at least five were reserved for possible MPs from the PA who would cross over. The President appears to have convinced her ranks in Parliament that the Government's peace moves could be supported without going over to its side, and also that they could not be genuinely critical of moves that could be harmful to peace if they were in the government ranks.

Allaying fears

In the past few weeks Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has been at much pains to allay Sinhala fears of a sell out to the LTTE, with the mounting opposition of the JVP that is appealing to Sinhala nationalist feeling. The Prime Minister had to play a difficult role in showing he would not give in to all LTTE demands, while not angering the LTTE in the process. When Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe met Sri Lanka's leading Buddhist prelates, the Most Ven. Agga Maha Pandita Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayake Thera of the Amarapura Sri Dhammarakshita Maha Nikaya at the Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayatanaya, Maharagama on 25 January to discuss the ethnic issue and receive their blessings, he was told by the prelates not to de-proscribe the LTTE and to continue the colonisation of Tamil areas in the north and east.

Reflecting the hardline position of the prelates, Ven. Pannasiha handed over to the Prime Minister a memorandum regarding the proposed peace talks and de-proscription of the LTTE. The memorandum stated that they could never approve a de-proscription of the LTTE as a precondition for talks as such a step would lead to a grave national and international crisis, and that they would not accept the LTTE's concept of a 'Tamil homeland' covering the northern and eastern provinces which was a "historical misconception"..

The Prime Minister had responded "We have never accepted the homeland concept. Our stand is that Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are living in the North and East. This stand has been included even in the Indo-Lanka accord. Therefore the homeland concept will never be accepted. No request pertaining to the homeland concept has been made to us so far either. We have always clearly expressed our stand on this issue."

Regarding the ban, Wickremesinghe told the monks that, "Various countries in the world have expressed their views on the LTTE proscription. Sri Lanka will not stand to lose anything internationally by entering peace talks. We have to consider this factor too. What we can do is to amend the regulations, regarding the ban. It will not mean a total lifting of the regulations." The Prime Minister said all necessary steps would be taken after discussions with the Maha Sangha and all parties.

To lift or not lift ban on LTTE

The LTTE has been insisting that the proscription imposed on it by Sri Lanka should be lifted as a precondition for talks between it and the LTTE. Because of the opposition it faces from many quarters, the new government has been agonising on this issue. Proposals like the suspension of the proscription in the run-up to the negotiations, and if the negotiations breakdown to re-impose it, or to come to an understanding with the LTTE to remove it as talks progress to a certain stage have been mooted and are thought to be under consideration by the parties. However, the details of the draft MoU between the parties the details of which have found its way into the media to the utter embarrassment of the Norwegians has sidestepped the issue.

In the meantime, countries in which the LTTE remains an outlawed organisation have said that their position would not be affected by whatever decision the Sri Lankan government takes on the issue. U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Ashley Wills said that the U.S. would use its own yardstick regarding the de-proscription of the LTTE. In an interview with a Colombo daily, the U.S. ambassador said that the Sri Lankan government was in a dilemma over the issue because of the possibility of a predetermined time to de-proscribe the LTTE may have a ripple effect on countries that have taken action to ban it as a foreign terrorist organization. He said that the government should be concerned over the issue as no sooner than the ban is lifted here as the LTTE rebels will demand the governments that have banned them to follow the example set by Sri Lanka itself. Regarding the U.S. attitude the ambassador said such a decision by the Sri Lankan government would be an internal matter and would not affect a U.S. decision. He said that any decision to de-proscribe LTTE would also be taken after an assessment similar to the one that was made when it was banned. He noted that a terrorist organization could get out of the banned list by a public renunciation of terrorism or a public renunciation of violence altogether.

On the question of whether the ban on the LTTE should be lifted in Sri Lanka, Britain's High Commissioner in Colombo, Linda Duffield, said that it was a matter for the Sri Lankan government to decide on the local ban and such move will not directly affect the ban in Britain. "The decision to proscribe the LTTE in Britain was taken in accordance with the criteria set out in the Terrorism Act 2000. The proscription of organisations in Britain under that Act is a matter for the Home Secretary. Before reconsidering his decision to proscribe an organisation the Home Secretary would have to be satisfied that the organisation in question had demonstrated a complete and convincing renunciation of terrorism," a statement issued by the High Commission said.

India made it clear that there was no change in its position on the banning of LTTE in the country. "There is no change in Government of India's position on the banning of the LTTE in India," an External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said on 22 January in response to a question on a statement made by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Parliament on the previous day in Colombo. She said the Government has seen the report of Wickremesinghe's statement in Sri Lankan Parliament touching upon the ban on the LTTE in the context of proposed negotiations between Colombo and the LTTE.

India and LTTE

The LTTE seemed undeterred by the lack of a favourable response from New

Delhi for its request made, on alleged humanitarian and logistics grounds, that initial negotiations between Sri Lanka and the LTTE be held in South India. Except for some minor parties, the proposal was completely turned down by the State Government of Tamilnadu and all major parties in India. However, the LTTE did not abandon the idea.

It arranged for the Norwegians to officially convey the request to the Indian Government. When this did not get the hoped for response, the LTTE took one of the most unusual moves in its history and fielded two of its top men to raise the stakes to a new level. According to the "EelamNation" website, "Senior leaders of the LTTE have urged the Indian Government to join forces with them in order to fight terrorism. India should not distance itself from Tamil community who live in Tamil Eelam.Tamils of Eelam have close linguistic, cultural, religious relationship with India for thousands of years and the Tamils of Tamil Eelam do not want to see historical links severed by some isolated events."

"The leader of political wing of the Liberation Tigers Thamilchelvan and the movement's intelligence chief Pottu Amman said last week that India and the LTTE should cooperate in many issues. India should not let the past dictate the present reality. Tamils of Eelam would have to lay criminal charges against India for the killings of thousands of people by the Indian Forces during 1987-1990 - the IPKF era. But they think that the past incidents should not harm the relationship with the mother India," the report said.

"The LTTE intelligence chief Pottu Amman said once Indian Government made a mistake without having consulted the LTTE. This distanced both in the past but it should not be prolonged. The region needed peace and stability and the LTTE would collaborate with the Governments in the region. He pointed out that once Indian Government made a blunder by sending Indian troops to fight the oppressed Tamils of Eelam. Occurrence of such incidents could have been avoided by communication. Misunderstandings were the primary cause why the clashes between the two parties occurred in the past. But it is paramount to keep good communication in order to prevent such incidents in the future," the report added.

The Tamil Guardian published from London said, "Whilst India's involvement in the island matters in the past proved controversial and ended unhappily for all concerned, the provision of a venue for talks in the context of the Norwegian peace initiative would be significant to the latter's success - something Delhi has consistently stressed its support for. A point of opposition that could be raised domestically is India's proscription of the LTTE. But that is based on unresolved matters, not related to the Sri Lankan conflict. The island's war has a considerable impact on India's regional economic, geopolitical and security concerns...(they) provide compelling reasons for the necessity of India's assistance in this regard."

Given what has happened in the past, including the role of the IPKF and the subsequent assassination of Rajiv Gandhi for which India holds the LTTE responsible, if it is its relations with India that the LTTE is seeking to rehabilitate, the question is whether the LTTE leadership is adopting the right approach in raising the matter openly and with such high publicity. Some commentators feel that the general tenor of the statements attributed these top leaders of the LTTE "sound quite condescending and sermonising to a country of the stature of India". They say that, requesting to afford a venue for talks on Indian soil on humanitarian grounds in respect of one of its key negotiators accompanied with threats of possible criminal charges against India in respect of the role of the IPKF in Sri Lanka sounds incomprehensibly arrogant rather than delicate diplomatic language which is what is required if the LTTE really wants to begin a process of rapprochement with India.

A mini-General Election

Nominations have now closed for the elections to the local authorities that will amount to a mini-General Election. The Polls dates are March 20 & 25 respectively. The first date is for areas other than the North & East, the latter for the North & East. There are 309 local bodies islandwide, with the North & East having 71. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and LTTE have demanded that no polls be held at this time in the North-East as it may affect the peace process. However, under the prevailing provisions of law the Commissioner General of Elections had no right to postpone polls anywhere, so nominations were accepted in the North-East too. Despite it not wanting polls to be held in these areas, the TNA submitted nomination lists in the Jaffna and other areas of the North-East, as they did not want any others to come in uncontested. The LTTE has criticized the TNA strongly for this action. It is now learnt that the Government has given the TNA the assurance that although nominations have been received no polls will be held in the North-East. The Government is expected to bring in special legislation in Parliament soon to permit the minister in charge of local government or the Commissioner General of Elections to postpone an election, even after accepting nominations, depending on reports from the Returning Officers of the respective areas, thus enabling the elections in the North-East to be postponed.

Although the TNA and LTTE opposed holding elections in all of the North-East, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress decided to field lists in the Digamadulla District of the East, where it has considerable strength. The EPRLF wing led by Varatharaja Perumal won control of the Parativu Pradesheeya Sabha in the Batticaloa by default, as election officials rejected the lists of other parties. Similarly, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress too won the Eravur Pradesheeya Sabha, coming in uncontested.

It is reliably learnt that the LTTE has indicated it will re-enter the democratic process, and contest the local polls in the North-East if they are postponed for at least eight months. The move by the LTTE is seen by many as a tactic for it to be on the Interim Council to be able to administer the North-East promised by Ranil Wickremesinghe during the last election campaign. This would give the LTTE a much bigger say in the affairs of the North-East than having to risk facing the people at local polls, however much it may be endorsed by the TNA.

The ruling United National Front (UNF) of which the UNP is the major partner looks at the coming local polls as a mini-General Election, that will reinforce its victory over the People's Alliance (PA) at the December 5, 2001 General Election. The PA being both demoralized and weakened lacks financial and other resources to mount a major campaign against the Government. It also lacks any media clout with all the media in the country being supportive of the government. The PA is also weakened by the many allegations of corruption at high level that are being revealed, and the

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fact that a large number of its activists, including area organisers and chairmen of Pradesheeya Sabhas are still held in remand custody on charges of pre-election violence during the December 2001 polls campaign.

The UNF is very eager to make almost a clean slate of the local polls that will be followed soon by the first budget of the UNF Government. One disadvantage it faces is the inability to make any serious dent in the cost of living so far. The prices of essential foodstuff remain as high or even higher than before the December General Election. The first Budget of the UNF is expected to bring in tough fiscal measures to recover the economic crises of the past two years, that led to the rate of growth of GDP being minus 0.7, a negative figure for the first time ever. Finance Minister Mr. N. K. Choksy in presenting the Vote on Account to tide over till the budget is passed, condemned the economic and fiscal mismanagement of the last government, and said that the actual deficit in the last budget was as high as 10.5 of GDP.

The coming local polls will not only be an opportunity for the UNF and Prime Minister to show that the people are still with them, but also an opportunity to see how much the people look at the PA and President Chandrika Kumaratunga as a credible alternative to the UNF, even after a short period from its defeat. These elections will also be a major test of the actual popularity of the JVP. This is an indicator the Government needs very badly, to assess how much the JVP has been able to arouse Sinhala racist feelings against the peace process.

Crises and new faces

The UNF is not without its own problems in facing this mini-General Election. Its Nuwara Eliya District organiser Mr. Navin Dissanayake, a non-Cabinet Minister, son of the late Gamini Dissanayake and son -in-law of the UNP's Deputy Leader Karu Jayasuriya, resigned from his position as district organiser, as his views had been ignored in selecting candidates for the local polls in the Nuwara Eliya District. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe was firm on the issue and said that anyone who resigns from any post given to him or her should resign from all offices, including the non-Cabinet rank office of Minister held by Dissanayake. Quick discussions between young Dissanayake and the Prime Minister ended in Dissanayake deciding to withdraw his resignation.

But things were not so simple for the Prime Minister and UNP leader when Cabinet Minister Arumugam Thondaman (Minister of Housing & Plantation Infrastructure) and Mr. Muthu Sivalingam, a Deputy Minister in the UNF government, both from the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), submitted their resignations from office of Minister and Deputy Minister respectively, over a similar dispute about the selection of candidates for the local polls. The two of them withdrew their resignations only after the Prime Minister bent backwards and agreed to give slots to the CWC nominees who had been excluded from the UNF lists. He could not use the whip as on young Dissanayake. The Prime Minister has even ordered an inquiry into how the exclusions of CWC nominees did take place. It was the first major crisis that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe faced, since taking over office. It demonstrated the dependence of the UNF on the minority parties for survival in Parliament. The CWC will be contesting the local polls too under the Elephant sym-

bol of the UNP, as it did in the last General Election.

The battle for Colombo

Meanwhile, in a surprise move the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress that is part of the UNF in Parliament, decided to field its own list of candidates for the Colombo Municipal Council, where the UNP traditionally gains a sizeable share of the Muslim vote. Obviously, SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem is keen to test the strength of his party in Colombo. This seems a good move at bargaining with the UNP in the CMC.

In another move that the UNP cannot be happy with, Mr. Mano Ganeshan, UNF MP from the Colombo District, who has filed his own independent list of candidates for Colombo, as he was not satisfied with the manner in which his nominees were excluded from the official UNP list. Mr. Ganeshan, a member of the Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) contested Colombo District on the UNF ticket in the December polls and was returned to Parliament with 55,000 votes.

In Colombo, both the UNF and PA field newcomers as possible mayoral candidates. The UNF' nominee is Mr. Pasanna Gunewardena, youngest son of the late Marxist leader Philip Gunewardena, and brother of Dinesh who leads the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) and Indika Gunewardena of the Community Party of Sri Lanka, both of whom are still with the PA and have been members of PA cabinets. The PA's own nominee for mayor is also a newcomer, Prof. Fazli Nizar, a senior gynaecologist, who enters politics for the first time. This shows that the PA is also targeting the Muslim vote in Colombo. In the last General Election too, Mr. A. H. M. Fowzie led the PA list in the Colombo District. Colombo city today has a majority from the Tamil and Muslim communities.

The PA in leadership struggle

President Chandrika Kumaratunga lost a major round in the emerging struggle for leadership of the SLFP and the PA. Much against her wishes she had o give in to grass roots demands from the SLFP organization, that Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse, senior vice-president of the SLFP, be selected Leader of the Opposition in Parliament. The move showed some aspects of farce with mysterious fax messages coming to the Office of the Speaker that former Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, who held the office of Leader of the Opposition, had resigned. Mr. Wickremanayake was conveniently away in Bangkok for medical treatment when all this happened, with the President's office denying that he had resigned. However, days later President Kumaratunga had too bow to pressure from the SLFP MPs and rank and file to appoint Mahinda Rajapakse to the office.

It is no secret that political relationships between the President and Mahinda Rajapakse are not the best. He is now a contender for the leadership of the SLFP, and through it the PA. He is a seasoned campaigner who has always been with the SLFP through its worst periods, and has a strong traditional vote base in Hambantota in the deep South. At present he has the blessings of the Buddhist clergy too. Rajapakse was not a very enthusiastic supporter of President Kumaratunga's constitutional reforms giving more devolution and rights to the minorities. However, it is now understood that the results of the last general election have shown him that it will not be easy or even possible to win power without the support of the minorities. He has now to cultivate the minorities and also distance himself from the JVP that is also strong in the South, if he is to mount a successful challenge to Chandrika Kumaratunga as leader of the SLFP. It is a challenge that may not be too far away.

Sri Lanka's Boat People

While the Sri Lanka Navy has lesser duties to perform in the high seas of the North due to the prevailing cessation of hostilities, it now has another major job on its hands. It is stopping the many trawlers that are carrying illegal emigrants from Sri Lanka, both Sinhalese and Tamils, to the promise of better days and earnings in Italy, or to enter other European countries through Italy or Greece. Last week, one such overloaded trawler that had left from the fisheries harbour at Devinuwara in the South at midnight, carrying over 125 persons from the Chilaw and Negombo areas capsized about 500 meters from land. There were only five survivors, rescued by fishermen of the area. The same week the Navy intercepted two more trawlers carrying huge loads of illegal emigrants lured by the attractions of Italy. The interception of such trawlers is becoming regular work for the navy.

The promise of a better life in the West, and the possibility of getting a passage there through Italy is being sold to unsuspecting people hopeful of making it good, by an organized group of business persons involved in the manpower export industry. The Government is being urged to take firm action to beak these rings of exploitation, but little seems to be done so far.

Justice by a journalist

In a landmark judgment by the High Court, Colombo, two Squadron Leaders of the Sri Lankan Air Force, were convicted to 7 years rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 10,000 each, after being found guilty of breaking into the house of journalist Iqbal Aththas, and threatening him and his family with firearms in 1998. Mr. Aththas, a senior journalist and Defence Correspondent for the "Sunday Times", who has won an international award for fearless reporting, had to face this threat on him and his family, days after he had made some serious revelations in his weekly Defence Column in the "Sunday Times" about the activities of the then Air Force Commander in his official capacity. One of those convicted was the Head of the Personal Security detail of the then Air Force Commander.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga ordered an immediate and impartial inquiry into the incident. Former Media Ministers Mangala Samaraweera and Anura Yapa of the PA followed this up through the entire period of investigation. At one stage in 2000, the Committee to Protect Journalists (New York) complained to the Attorney General that the prosecution was dragging the case. The AG agreed to ensure the case would be expedited. The result was last week's conviction. This was the first time that any person has been punished for attacks or threats on journalists over the carrying out their profession. The High Court judge was strong in his comments that the attack on a journalist for what he writes is a gross violation of the right to free expression found in the Constitution. Mr. Aththas, who is also the CNN stringer here, did not fail to thank President Kumaratunga and the PA Ministers who ensured that the case was brought to trial and a successful conclusion.

NEWS TRACK

●**Lift ban on LTTE:** 20 Jan - The Tamil United National Front (TULF), main component of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) appealed to the Government to lift the ban imposed on the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka before the commencement of peace talks and not to hold elections to local authorities in the northeast province. "At the last general election the Tamil people have overwhelmingly endorsed the lifting of the ban on the LTTE in Sri Lanka prior to the commencement of peace talks. Furthermore the TULF urges the Government to postpone the holding of the local poll in northeast as the conduct of the election in the current situation could have the effect of retarding negotiations between the Government and the LTTE", said a press release issued by the TULF Secretary General of the TULF Mr. R.Sam-panthan.

● **LTTE Releases 10 PoWs:** 21 Jan - Mr. S. P.Thamilchelvan, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, addressing the ten prisoners of war who were released in Kilinochchi on 21 January said, "Our national leader directed that the 10 POWs be released as a goodwill gesture to further improve and strengthen the present peace environment and towards the peace initiatives of the present Sri Lankan government." Mr. Thamilchelvan further said. "We respect the reasonable feelings of the Sinhala people. We only want our people to live in their land with honour and freedom and to enjoy all their rights sans military restrictions and intimidation. We want our people to have the freedoms and rights, which the Sinhala people are able to enjoy now. I request you to clearly and openly convey this message from our national leader to the people in the south and I urge you to continue the work towards bringing about just and permanent peace to the country."

●**Sri Lanka extends ceasefire:** 21 Jan - The government has reciprocated the extension of a unilateral truce by the Tamil Tigers.. The Norwegian government in a statement said that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had informed it that Colombo was also extending its truce by another month till February 24. The move was to "provide Norway time to facilitate a mutually agreed ceasefire between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)."

● **US position on LTTE Ban:** 21 Jan - U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Ashley Wills said that the U.S. would use its own yardstick regarding the de-proscription of the LTTE as the question had arisen again recently with the revival of the Norwegian-brokered peace process in the country. In an interview with the Daily News, the U.S. ambassador said that the Sri Lankan government was in a dilemma over the issue because of the possibility of a predetermined time to de-proscribe the LTTE may have a ripple effect on countries that have taken action to ban it as a foreign terrorist organization. He said that the government should be concerned over the issue as no sooner than the ban is lifted here as the LTTE rebels will demand the governments that have banned them to follow the examples by Sri Lanka itself. Regarding the U.S. attitude the ambassador said such a decision by the Sri Lankan government would be an internal matter and would not affect a U.S. decision. He said that any decision to de-proscribe LTTE would also be taken after an assessment similar to the one, which was made when it was banned. He noted that a terrorist organization could get out of the banned list by a public renunciation of terrorism or a public renunciation of violence altogether.

● **Navy pulls out of fight with LTTE flotilla:** 22 Jan - Sri Lanka' s Navy pulled back from a confrontation with a flotilla of Sea Tiger boats in the island's northern waters in the early hours of today, as the Government followed the LTTE in announcing an extension of the current truce till February 24. The confrontation between the Navy and the LTTE began shortly after midnight when a naval missile boat spotted a flotilla of nine Sea Tiger boats south of Point Pedro, defence sources said.

●**Norway in further discussions:** 22 Jan - A delegation of the Norwegian government met the LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Mr. Anton Balasingham, on 22 January for another round of discussions regarding the formulation of a structured, mutually acceptable ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. Erik Solheim, special advisor to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and Kjirste Tromsdal, an official with the same Ministry, met Mr. Balasingham at his residence in London for three hours. Mr. Solheim had discussed with the Sri Lankan government the proposals for a permanent ceasefire put forward by the LTTE two weeks earlier and the discussions in London were to progress the matter further.

● **No change on LTTE ban in India:** 22 Jan - India today made it clear that there was no change in its position on the banning of LTTE in the country. "There is no change in Government of India's position on the banning of the LTTE in India," an External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said in response to a question on a statement made by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Parliament on the previous day in Colombo. She said the Government has seen the report of Wickremesinghe's statement in Sri Lankan Parliament touching upon the ban on the LTTE in the context of proposed negotiations between Colombo and the LTTE.

● **LTTE welcomes Ranil's speech:** 23 Jan – LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr. Anton Balasingham, welcomed the Sri Lankan government's decision to review its proscription of the LTTE so as to pave the way for future negotiations with the organisation. Mr. Balasingham said the de-proscription of the LTTE was a long-standing impediment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. He described Mr. Wickremesinghe's statement to the Sri Lankan Parliament on 21 January saying deep thought should be given to the ban on the LTTE, as "an encouraging sign of the new government's commitment" to end the ethnic conflict. "The de-proscription of the LTTE will be a recognition of the legitimacy of the Tamil people's struggle. It is not a concession [by the government] but an acknowledgement of our position as the authentic representatives of the Tamil people," he said. He praised Premier Wickremesinghe as "a realist and a man of vision genuinely committed to bringing peace and prosperity to the island which has been devastated by war."

● **Police free rebels who threatened suicide:** 23 Jan - Sri Lankan police freed two Tamil Tiger rebels who had threatened to commit suicide if they were charged with carrying illegal weapons, the defence ministry said. Two members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were arrested by troops with a gun and a radio communication set and handed over to police in the eastern town of Batticaloa on 20 January, the ministry said. "These suspects threatened... they would commit suicide by swallowing cyanide capsules (carried by them) if any legal action was carried out," the ministry said.

● **Compensation for raped woman:** 24 Jan – A bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justices Mark Fernando, C.V. Vigneswaran and Ameer Ismail, on 24 January, directed the State to pay one hundred and

fifty thousand rupees as compensation to Velu Arshadevi, a Tamil woman who was raped by three soldiers of the Sri Lanka army at a checkpoint in Maradana in Colombo on 24 June last year in a fundamental rights application filed by victim.

The woman in her application asked the Court to determine that her fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 11 and 13 (1) of the Constitution had been violated by three soldiers of the Sri Lanka Army by committing rape on her on 24 June last year at the checkpoint. She stated in her application on the day of incident that she was taken to the said checkpoint of the army under the pretext of an inquiry where three soldiers had raped her.

After inquiry the SC held that the fundamental rights of the petitioner woman had been violated and awarded compensation.

Three soldiers and three police officers charged with raping the woman are presently on bail.

The London-based Amnesty International has hailed the Supreme Court's decision as unprecedented. "This is a landmark judgement. It is the first time that the court has awarded compensation to a rape victim, confirming that rape in custody constitutes torture," Amnesty International said in a statement on the ruling. "If it [the case] were to go to trial, it would set another precedent, constituting the first prosecution of members of the security forces in relation to rape in custody."

● **Lanka to introduce press reforms:** 25 Jan - The government plans to abolish laws of criminal defamation, set up an independent Press Complaints Commission (PCC), and introduce a Freedom of Information Act, as part of a series of sweeping reforms to usher in media freedom. "We will introduce a series of reforms that will benefit and secure media freedom," Constitutional Affairs Minister Gamini Peiris told reporters. He said the government would repeal the law of defamation, in existence since 1883, which provides a prison sentence for those convicted of criminal defamation.

● **Buddhist monks oppose lifting LTTE ban:** Jan 25 - When Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe met Sri Lanka'a leading Buddhist prelates, the Most Ven. Agga Maha Pandita Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayake Thera of the Amarapura Sri Dhammarakshita Maha Nikaya at the Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayatanaya, Maharagama on 25 January to discuss the ethnic issue and receive their blessings, he was told by the prelates not to de-proscribe the Liberation Tigers and to continue the colonisation of Tamil areas in the north and east.

Reflecting the hardline position of the prelates, Ven. Pannasiha handed over to the Prime Minister a memorandum regarding the proposed peace talks and de-proscription of the LTTE. The memorandum stated that they could never approve a de-proscription of the LTTE as a precondition for talks as such a step would lead to a grave national and international crisis, and that they would not accept the LTTE's concept of a 'Tamil homeland' covering the northern and eastern provinces which was a "historical misconception"..

The Prime Minister had responded "We have never accepted the homeland concept. Our stand is that Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are living in the North and East. This stand has been included even in the Indo-Lanka accord. Therefore the homeland concept will never be accepted. No request pertaining to the homeland concept has been made to us so far either. We have always clearly expressed our stand on this issue."

Regarding the ban, Wickremesinghe told the monks that, "Various countries in the world have expressed their views on the LTTE proscription. Sri Lanka will not stand to lose anything internationally by entering peace talks. We have to consider this factor too. What we can do is to amend the regulations, regarding the ban. It will not mean a total lifting of the regulations." The Prime Minister said all necessary steps would be taken after discussions with the Maha Sangha and all parties.

Ven. Pannasiha also requested the Prime Minister to create settlements in selected jungle land in the North-East and settle people in them according to the communal ratio after providing tube wells to ensure them their water supply. The Prime Minister said he would look into this matter.

● **Security chief to indicted:** 25 Jan - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Nihal Karunaratna, who is the head of the Presidential Security Division, is to be indicted in connection with the attempted murder of Agriculture minister S.B. Dissanayake during the campaign for the general elections in December last.

● **Thondaman meets LTTE in Mutur:** Jan 27 - Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, Minister for Housing and Estate Infrastructure, a in the United National Front government, had discussions with the Liberation Tigers in Sampur, a village held by them south of the eastern port town of Trincomalee, on 27 January. Mr. Thondaman who is also the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, a powerful trade union in the island's plantation sector, is the first minister of the UNF government to visit an area in the northeast province held by the LTTE. Mr. Thondaman met Mr. Iyngaran, the head of LTTE's political wing in the Trincomalee district in Mutur east. With whom he discussed the hardships faced by the people of the region and the means of resolving their day-to-day problems with a view to restoring normalcy in Mutur east.

● **Britain backs Colombo initiatives:** 27 Jan - Britain has expressed that it will fully support the peace initiatives taken by the Sri Lankan government in a bid to bring the Tamil guerrillas back to the negotiating table, but says it will take its own decision regarding the ban on the organisation imposed by London. Britain's High Commissioner in Colombo Linda Duffield, in a statement issued here, said "we welcome all moves towards peace talks".

On the question of whether the ban on the LTTE should be lifted in Sri Lanka, the High Commissioner said that it was a matter for the Sri Lankan government to decide on the local ban and such move will not directly affect the ban in Britain. "The decision to proscribe the LTTE in Britain was taken in accordance with the criteria set out in the Terrorism Act 2000. The proscription of organisations in Britain under that Act is a matter for the Home Secretary. Before reconsidering his decision to proscribe an organisation the Home Secretary would have to be satisfied that the organisation in question had demonstrated a complete and convincing renunciation of terrorism," a statement issued by the High Commission said.

● **SLMC Leader's Letter to LTTE leader:** 27 Jan – Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem read out a letter he had sent LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to coincide with the Hindu festival of Thaipongal on January 14 where he complained that the Muslims living in the country's eastern province were subjected to fear and large-scale extortion at the hands of LTTE cadres. The letter called for a public announcement of the LTTE's stand on the Muslims living in the east, and said otherwise "the Muslims would not be able to break away from the siege mentality of having to pay ransom for survival". Hakeem said that the eastern province was "as much the homeland of the Muslims as it is of the Tamils".

In his letter written in the Tamil language and addressing the LTTE leader as 'Brother Prabhakaran' and 'Leader Prabhakaran', the Muslim Congress leader has urged him to stop extortion, abduction, the setting up of LTTE camps in Muslim villages, conscription of Muslim youth to the LTTE, avenging Muslims serving in government forces and also to recognise the SLMC as the voice of the Muslims. Hakeem urged Prabhakaran to enter into a dialogue to reach a political solution to the problems of the two communities "that speak the same (Tamil) language.

● **Optimism over permanent ceasefire:** 28 Jan - After another meeting in London with a Norwegian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, which lasted three hours, LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Mr Anton Balasingham, said that substantial progress has been made in the ongoing facilitatory efforts by the Norwegian government to formalise and finalise a stable and structured ceasefire. He also expressed optimism a mutually agreeable permanent ceasefire could be signed by both sides before February 24, when the present unilateral cessation of hostilities by both sides are due to expire. The Norwegian delegation also included Mr. Erik Solheim, Special Advisor to the Foreign Ministry, Kjirste Tromsdal, an official with the same Ministry and Mr. Jon Westborg, Oslo's Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

● **JVP steps up protests:** Jan 29 - Hundreds of Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) members and activists demonstrated in Colombo on 29 January against government's proposal to negotiate with the Tamil Tigers with Norwegian facilitation, and against the grant of the LTTE's demand for the lifting of its proscription by the government. A self-styled radical Marxist party that draws on Sinhala nationalist sentiments to augment its popularity, the JVP with sixteen MPs in parliament, says that it will oppose tooth and nail any solution to the ethnic conflict in the island based on regional autonomy or federalism, which it says would lead to the division of the country. The JVP pledged to escalate an island-wide mass protest if the United National Front government did not heed its demands

● **Warrant for arrest of PSD Chief:** 29 Jan -. A court warrant was issued today for police to arrest Nihal Karunaratne, Chief of the Presidential Security Division (PSD). Karunaratne is wanted for having threatened the Officer in Charge of the Hanguranketha police station, Gunaratne Bandara, with death on November 20, accusing Bandara of working in support of S. B. Dissanayake. Bandara had immediately reported the incident to his superior, the ASP of the area, and made a police entry recording the exact words Karunaratne had used which included slang.

● **PTA Suspects to be released:** 29 Jan - With the LTTE releasing ten prisoners last week and the clamour for a similar reciprocal measure from the government, Defence Minister Thilak Marapana took initial steps for speeding up the process of trial or release of the prisoners held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Mr Marapana told the press that he had instructed officials to urgently look into the cases of all suspects held under PTA. The Attorney General's department would then decide on whom to prosecute and whom to release. The Defence Minister said that once a suspect was arrested under the PTA, there could be indefinite detention pending investigations and there was a tendency to forget their plight. A former Attorney General himself, the Defence Minister said there was no magic in holding on to suspects held for minor offences like withholding information, as even when they were prosecuted, on pleading guilty, they were only given suspended sentences. The biggest grouse of suspects held under the PTA was that their cases were often pending for years.

● **EPDP MP further remanded:** 29 Jan - The non-summary proceedings in the Naranthanai election murder case commenced 29 January before the Jaffna Magistrate Mr. R. T. Viknaraja. Three persons, including Mr. N. Mathanarajan, the Eelam People's Democratic Party MP for Jaffna, have been charged on 29 counts including murder, attempted murder, causing grievous hurt by assaulting candidates and supporters of the Tamil National Alliance with iron rods, weapons and clubs and unlawful assembly in Naranthanai in the island of Kayts off Jaffna on November 28.

Only two of the accused, Mr. Mathanarajan and 'Jeevan', a cadre of the EPDP, were produced in court. The third accused, 'Napolean', described as the military commander of the EPDP in the island of Kayts, was not produced in court as he is still evading arrest.

The evidence of Kanakaretnam Nadaraja who is a supporter of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) was recorded. The Magistrate put off further hearing on the case for January 31. The two accused were ordered further remand.

● **Fishermen's protest:** 30 Jan - More than a seven hundred fishermen began a protest sit in front of the Jaffna district secretariat from 7.30 am on 30 January. The fishermen blocked government officials from entering the Jaffna district secretariat. They vowed to continue the protest if the government did not take steps to lift the ban and restrictions imposed by the Sri Lankan security forces on fishing in Jaffna.

The protest was organised by the Federation of Fisheries Societies of Jaffna, the Fisheries Co-operative Societies of Vadamaradchi and Vadamaradchi East and several fisheries co-operatives from the islands of Kayts and Karainagar.

● **Call for LTTE-Colombo talks in India:** 30 Jan - With the Tamil Nadu Government expressing strong opposition to any move to allow the LTTE to hold peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government in Chennai, speakers from pro-LTTE groups in the State rallied together in Chennai to urge India to assist the negotiations. The Eelam Tamils Supporters Coordination Committee (ETSCC) organized a conference on January 30 in Chennai on the subject "the Grief of Eelam Tamils and the Duty of India", where speakers asked the Indian Government to permit peace talks between the LTTE and Sri Lankan Government to be held in one of the cities of Southern India. Mr. Pazha Nedumaran, the convener of ETSCC and leader of Tamil Nationalist Movement, said India should not keep silent on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Tens of thousands of Tamils have already fallen victims in Sri Lanka and hundreds of thousands of people have been made homeless. The miseries of Eelam Tamils are still continuing, and will continue until constructive peace comes into effect in the war-torn Island. He said if anyone thinks that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam will be defeated militarily, it would never happen. Mr. V. Pirapaharan, the leader of LTTE, is a military and diplomatic prowess. Tamil Nadu or Indian Governments should not lay obstacles to the peace process initiated by the Norwegian Government in order to bring a peace and security to that Island, he said. P. Nedumaran, questioned the rationale of opposing the LTTE citing the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, asked: "Will you banish all Brahmins from the country because a Brahmin killed Mahatma Gandhi? Or deport Sikhs because a couple of them assassinated Indira Gandhi?"

● **Tigers should be absorbed in SL army:** 30 Jan - Sri Lanka's Army Commander Lt Gen. Lionel Balagalle wants the government to seriously consider enlisting Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the security forces if the Norwegian backed peace process turns out to be a success. The army chief said that the proposal should be given immediate consideration and that the country should not await to be confronted with the problem. The army commander made the suggestion at a Unicef-sponsored two-day seminar on 'Training of Sri Lanka Security Forces in the Protection of Captured Child Combatants while in Military Custody' which began in Colombo on 30 January. The army commander also said that consideration should also be given to the issue of child soldiers. However, under the country's laws persons under 18 cannot be employed and many of the child soldiers cannot be brought into the regular army. One of the main areas being dealt at the workshop was the issue of rehabilitating child soldiers.

● **Muslims want place in peace talks:** 31 Jan - The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim

Congress (SLMC), Rauff Hakeem, has called for the participation of his party in the forthcoming peace talks between the government and the LTTE. Hakeem, an important cabinet minister in the new government has asked for tripartite talks between the government-LTTE-and the Muslims represented by his party. The SLMC leader made this call when he met two Colombo-based High Commissioners, Linda Duffield of the UK and Ruth Archibald of Canada.

● **No Peace in Lanka Without Indian blessings:** 31 Jan - There cannot be peace in Sri Lanka without the support and the blessings of India, Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando said. In an interview with BBC's Sinhala service, Sandeshaya, Mr.Fernando said that without the help of the country where the problem started by training Tamil Tigers, namely India, Sri Lanka could not achieve a long term solution to the national question.

Mr. Fernando, who was attending the commonwealth Ministerial meeting in London, further said that the United National Party led government would consider lifting the ban on the Tamil Tigers only if progress is made in peace talks. Opposition parties and Nationalist groups have voiced concerns about calls by LTTE to deproscribe them before talks start. But according to Mr. Fernando, lifting the ban on Tigers was not a major obstacle for the Norwegian brokered peace process. "There are two ways to defeat terrorism," he said adding. "It can be either militarily or by negotiation. As decades of continuing war showed that the peace cannot be achieved by military means, the government and the people of Sri Lanka were ready to negotiate."

● **Muslims protest against extortion:** 31 Jan - Shops and offices in a Muslim town in northeastern Sri Lanka closed on 31 January in protest against extortion reportedly by Tamil Tigers, which residents said has been intensifying despite an ongoing truce. Public transport was also off the streets in the town of Kinniya in the district of Trincomalee. Residents said the work stoppage was being observed in protest against the LTTE stepping up their "tax" collection.

● **Tamil political prisoners fast:** 1 Feb - Tamil political prisoners in jails and detention centres across Sri Lanka began a protest fast on 1 February demanding that they be acquitted or be released as they are being held for extended periods without any legal proceedings being instituted against them in courts by the Attorney General's Department. Human rights lawyers estimate that more than 1800 Tamils arrested under the PTA are being held in the detention centres and prisons in various parts of the island. One of the protesting prisoners in the Batticaloa jail, Mr. Soysa Arunasalam of Mannampitti, said that four members of his family are also being held under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in other parts of the island, separated from him.

● **Recuitment of teenagers reported:** 1 Feb – BBC correspondent, Frances Harrison, from Colombo stated that reports from eastern Sri Lanka say Tamil Tiger rebels there are taking advantage of the current ceasefire with the government to step up forced recruitment of teenagers for their war effort. Local people also say there has been a marked increase in extortion and abduction for ransom by the rebels. The moves have raised tension and caused some families to consider moving out of the area to protect their children. Most people in the east are too scared to say anything publicly. But it is clear the local rebel commanders have started coming into government-controlled areas for recruitment. They are taking advantage of the current ceasefire to move around in Batticaloa district, visiting families and demanding that they give at least one child to the movement. Community leaders say the Tamil Tigers are forci-

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bly conscripting young boys and girls who look fit enough to fight from families who had previously fled rebel territory, precisely to avoid such an eventuality.

There are also reports throughout the east of Sri Lanka of increased extortion by the rebels, sometimes of sums up to the equivalent of $1,000. Local people say the rebels are now demanding that teachers and government officials pay 12% of their salary as an unofficial tax, as opposed to five percent previously. In one town in Trincomalee district, shops and offices closed in protest at what they said was increased extortion by the Tamil Tigers.

What is not clear is whether the rebel leadership in the north of Sri Lanka is fully aware of what their cadres in the east are doing. The Catholic bishop of Mannar, in north-western Sri Lanka, says he informed the leader of the Tamil Tigers political wing, Mr S P Tamilselvan, last week about the increased conscription and extortion. It is his understanding that Mr Tamilselvan, who is currently involved in peace negotiations with the government, was surprised to hear what was going on.

The issue is a very serious one, as it threatens to undermine what the government says is the last chance for peace in Sri Lanka. And it is causing alarm among Tamil civilians who say they increasingly fear the rebels who claim to be their sole representatives.

● **Lankan refugees in India to return:** 1 Feb - Some 4,000 Sri Lankan families who fled to India in the wake of fierce fighting in the island are trying to return home. Deputy Fisheries Minister Mohideen Abdul Cader said Tamil refugees living in camps at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu were ready to return to their homes in the north and east of the island because of the ceasefire, in its second consecutive month now, between government forces and the Tamil Tigers since Christmas Eve. An estimated 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have taken up residence in Tamil Nadu. The exodus began during widespread attacks by Sinhalese rioters on Tamils in Sri Lanka that began in July 1983. Since then, hundreds of Sri Lankans have sailed in small boats across the narrow Palk Strait which separates the two countries whenever fighting between the LTTE and the security forces grew intense.

● **Lanka remains world's top tea exporter:** 1 Feb - Sri Lanka has retained its position as the world's largest exporter of tea by selling a record 294 million kilograms (646.8 million pounds) last year. Exports grew by a modest 2.1 percent last year compared to the 287.9 million kilos of tea sold to overseas buyers in 2000, tea broking firm Forbes and Walker said. Tea trade officials said that Sri Lanka's main competitor Kenya exported about 217 million kilos last year. Despite Sri Lanka's higher tea exports last year and a 13.8 percent increase in revenues, the foreign exchange earned from tea exports last year fell marginally. Officials said the US dollar earnings dropped because the Sri Lankan rupee depreciated by about 16.5 percent against the greenback last year.

Prices at the weekly Colombo tea auction, the world's largest tea sale where six to seven million kilos of tea change hands, is set in local currency. Forbes and Walker said the average price of a kilo of tea dropped from 2.38 dollars in 2000 to 2.33 dollars last year.

The main buyer of Sri Lankan tea is the former Soviet Union bloc. The other top destinations for Sri Lankan tea are the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, Britain, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.

● **New Opposition Leader:** 1 Feb - Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main constituent party of the opposition Peoples Alliance, decided at meeting held on 31 January chaired by the party leader, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, to appoint senior parliamentarian Mahinda Rajapaksha as the Leader of the Opposition, in place of Mr Ratnasiri Wickremanayake who reportedly resigned for medical reasons.

Hailing from the well-known political dynasty of the Rajapakshas, after qualifying as a lawyer, Mahinda started his political career in 1970 being elected as the youngest Member of the Parliament. He is regarded as one of the main architects who brought the SLFP back to power in 1994, after seventeen years of political wilderness. One of the most senior members of the current parliament, Mr. Rajapaksha held a several cabinet portfolios in the 1994 and 2000 consecutive Peoples Alliance (PA) governments. Before being appointed to his present post, he functioned as the Chief Opposition Whip.

His father, D.A. Rajapaksha, left the then ruling United National Party (UNP) with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the slain father of President Kumaratunga, to form the SLFP in 1952. Commanding widespread support from the rank and file of his party, SLFP branches throughout the country are reported have urged the party hierarchy to offer him the leadership to reorganise the party after its humiliating defeat at the December 5 general elections.

● **LTTE Creates Special Task Force:** 2 Feb - Tamil Tigers have recently created a Special Task Force (STF) in Vanni under the personal guidance of their leader, Vellupilai Prabhakaran, The STF unit has been created as an affiliated squad to the LTTE's Tamil Eelam police force and it has already recruited one thousand cadres, Batticaloa correspondent, Shanthi Selvadurai, reported to the BBC's Sandeshaya service quoting Jaffna's Tamil daily Uthayan.

● **UNICEF reacts against child-recruitment:** 2 Feb - The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund(UNICEF) expressed deep concern over reports that the LTTE was continuing to the practice of recruiting child soldiers despite the ongoing ceasefine between government forces and the Tamil Tigers.

Confirming its concern, Unicef's Colombo chief Colin Glennie told reporters in Colombo on 1 February, "We have had reports that children are still forcibly being taken and even during the ceasefire period, a lot of pressure is being put on children to join the LTTE. Reports indicate there is psychological pressure to join the LTTE while a few cases of physical abductions were also reported. Older people are being taken forcibly."

Glennie said that Unicef was making representation to the LTTE directly to adhere to the commitment it made to the UN's Special Representative, Olara Otunu in May 1998 to refrain from recruiting child combatants. It appeared that the LTTE was violating its pledge. He added that after the 1998 pledge, the LTTE put up banners and posters claiming there would be no child recruitment, but these appeared to be largely slogans and the abuse of children was continuing.

● **Appeal LTTE to Stop Forced Conscription:** 2 Feb - Political parties should publicly appeal to the LTTE to stop abduction and forcible recruitment of Tamil youths as it may disrupt the Norwegian brokered peace process, a leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said. N.Raviraj, Jaffna district MP and the former Mayor of Jaffna, said that although the party had not received complains from the voters, it is not in the interest of the peace process and the confidence building measures if the Tamil Tigers are forcibly conscripting the children and youth from North-East.

"We do not have direct contacts with the LTTE. But if our electorate complain, we would appeal, via the electorate, to the LTTE to stop those practices" Mr. Raviraj told BBC's Sandeshaya. When contacted by Sandeshaya, Batticaloa district MP, Joseph Pararajasingham, denied receiving any complaints of abduction, extortion of forced recruitment of child soldiers by the LTTE. He, however, promised to look into the matter.

● **US support for peace process:** 2 Feb - The United States has urged the Sri Lankan government and LTTE to engage in a produc-

tive dialogue to resolve the conflict and said Washington's policy towards the rebels will not be affected by any move to remove the domestic ban on them. Receiving the Sri Lankan economic reform minister Milinda Moragoda in Washington, US acting Secretary of State Richard Armitage said that the US fully supported the peace efforts backed by Norway. On the question of possible deproscription of the LTTE, Armitage said that US policy would be unaffected should the government of Sri Lanka decide to remove its ban on the organisation. He also reiterated his country's support for the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

● **Congress Opposed to LTTE request:** 2 Feb - The Congress Party vehemently opposed the idea of India either hosting or facilitating talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Responding to queries relating to the Tamil Tigers request for south Indian venue for the talks, the party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, asked "the LTTE is a banned organisation, how can the Government mediate between a banned organisation and the Lankan Government"? The party made it clear that it was also opposed to the idea of allowing Anton Balasingham to stay in Chennai. "The LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, was directly and personally involved in the murder of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. We want him extradited. How can we allow his representative or his organisation to hold talks on Indian soil?" Mr. Reddy asked.

● **Call for release of PTA suspects:** 3 Feb - The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) appealed to President Chandrika Kumaratunge to exercise her wide power to release all Tamil political prisoners who have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) under a general amnesty. "I bring to your notice that thousands of Tamil youths are languishing in jails in several parts of the country. All of them were arrested and detained during the People's Alliance government under the PTA. There is no evidence against majority of the Tamil political prisoners," said Mr.M.Sivasithambaram, MP and the President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which is the main constituent of the TNA in a letter to the President.

● **Moves to scuttle peace in east:** 3 Feb - "Corrupts elements in the Sri Lanka army and paramilitary groups operating with it are making covert attempts in the east to scuttle the peace negotiations between the Tigers and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesighe's government", said the deputy leader of the political wing of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. Karikalan, addressing a press conference in Kokkaddicholai, 14 kilometres southwest of Batticaloa.

"In this context the LTTE would like to underscore the fact that it was our military resistance that ultimately impelled the Sri Lankan State to begin peace talks with us. None one would have been talking about peace for the Tamil people today if we didn't have the military power to withstand the massive SLA operation against the LTTE in April last year" he said.

Asked about reports of forcible conscription of children, Karkilan said, "Although no one has complained recently to the ICRC or Sri Lanka's human rights commission that we have forcefully conscripted anybody, it is still our wish to see that we are not maligned further by reports and rumours that our organisation is forcing youth to join."

Questioned about the alleged harassment of Muslim people in the east Mr.Karikalan said, that the LTTE wants to maintain friendly and harmonious relationship with the Muslim people, and the LTTE will fight for their political rights also.

● **Pottu Amman on mending fences with India:** 3 Feb - Pottu Amman, the chief of the intelligence wing of the LTTE and "accused number two" in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, has said that Indian intelligence agents had conveyed to him New Delhi's willingness to mend fences with the LTTE. Talking to a special correspondent of the Tamil publication Sudar Oli, Pottu Amman said while this was welcome, he wished that India would establish contacts with the LTTE's political wing and convey such ideas to them directly rather than go through the intelligence wings. He refused to go into details of the India-LTTE intelligence contacts and what the Indians told the LTTE's secret operatives. According to Sudar Oli, Pottu Amman was passionately devoted to the idea of the LTTE's building bridges with India despite the fact he and the Tamil Tiger leader Pirabharan have been declared proclaimed offenders in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case. "It was the lack of mutual understanding, rather than events and actions, that created conflicts between India and the LTTE, and we still have opportunities to remove all bitterness by fostering such understanding," Amman said

● **Tamil Tigers Urge India to Join Forces:** 3 Feb - Senior leaders of the LTTE have urged the Indian Government to join forces with them in order to fight terrorism. India should not distance itself from Tamil community who live in Tamil Eelam. Tamils of Eelam have close linguistic, cultural, religious relationship with India for thousands of years and the Tamils of Tamil Eelam do not want to see historical links severed by some isolated events, the pro-LTTE Eelam-Nation website reported.

The leader of political wing of the Liberation Tigers Thamilchelvan and the movement's intelligence chief Pottu Amman said last week that India and the LTTE should cooperate in many issues. India should not let the past dictate the present reality. Tamils of Eelam would have to lay criminal charges against India for the killings of thousands of people by the Indian Forces during 1987-1990. But they think that the past incidents should not harm the relationship with the mother India, the report said.

The LTTE intelligence chief Pottu Amman said once Indian Government made a mistake without having consulted the LTTE. This distanced both in the past but it should not be prolonged. The region needed peace and stability and the LTTE would collaborate with the Governments in the region. He pointed out that once Indian Government made a blunder by sending Indian troops to fight the oppressed Tamils of Eelam. Occurrence of such incidents could have been avoided by communication. Misunderstandings were the primary cause why the clashes between the two parties occurred in the past. But it is paramount to keep good communication in order to prevent such incidents in the future, the report added.

● **Black flag for Independence Day:** 4 Feb - Jaffna's Government Agent, Mr .K. Shanmuganathan, could not hoist the Sri Lankan national flag and hold the customary ceremony at the secretariat on 4 February to mark 54th anniversary of the island's independence from British rule because of protesting fishermen who were urging Colombo to lift the restrictions on fishing in the northern waters of the island. Instead black flags flew on the Jaffna District Secretariat. The secretary of the Federation of Vadamaradchi Fisheries Societies, Mr. S. Sooriyakumar, hoisted a black flag on the ceremonial flagpole at the Secretariat. More than 1500 fishermen wearing bands thronged the Jaffna secretariat for the protest.

● **Road opens after a decade:** 4 Feb - The Sri Lankan government re-opened the highway from Vavuniya to Trincomalee through Horawapotana on 4 February. A bus service along the road to Trincomalee was started on the same day. The army closed the road ten years ago. The highway is the shortest route - 96 kilometres - from Vavuniya to the eastern port town.

● **Over 50 dead as trawler capsizes:** 4 Feb - At least 50 Sri Lankan would-have-been illegal emigrants were feared dead or missing when a trawler carrying some 150 youths heading for Italy capsized on 3 February in the sea off Matara, about 160 kilometers south of capital Colombo. The trawler,

which started midnight on the previous day from Negombo on the west coast, some 30 kilometers north of Colombo, collided against a rock in the rough sea and capsized early on 3 February. Police said that 10 bodies had been recovered and 12 survivors had been brought to Matara hospital. Rescue operation was underway for the missing. Some of them might have swum to the shore and escaped, police said. The would-be emigrants are reported to have paid huge sums of money in an attempt to be smuggled out for employment in Italy. During the past several months, police had arrested over 350 Sri Lankan illegal emigrants who boarded trawlers heading for Italy.

● **No plan to impeach Chandrika:** 4 Feb – The new United National Front government has informed President Chandrika Kumaratunga that it has no plans to impeach her. The government's views on the rumour about possible impeachment against were conveyed to President Kumaratunga during a three-hour meeting at President's House this when she met with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, ending two months of speculation.

● **Muslims protest against extortion:** 5 Feb - Thousands of Sri Lankan Muslims continued their protest against extortions, abduction of Muslim civilians allegedly by Tamil Tigers in the east of the country on 5 February. The Muslim civilians began their fast onto death protest campaign on 3 February at a suburb of Trincomalee City, some 300 kilometers northeast of capital Colombo, demanding the LTTE to stop their practice. A Muslim MP from leftist JVP or People's Liberation Front (JVP) joined the protest and extended her support to the protesters. In a statement she accused the government of turning deaf ear towards the LTTE atrocities and appealed the government to take immediate steps to arrest this situation.

● **Hitch in signing of permanent truce:** 5 Feb – Reports from Colombo indicate that moves to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a permanent truce has run into obstacles with LTTE demanding that permanent ceasefire be extended to sea with the government wanting it to be effective only on land and not the sea, as it wants the Navy to thwart any LTTE moves to unload arms. The Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka Jon Westborg, who was in the four member Norwegian delegation that met with LTTE spokesman Dr. Anton Balasingham in London on January 28th came to Sri Lanka and briefed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and minister of constitutional Affairs Prof. G. L. Pieris on latest developments in this connection and obtained their counter proposals which were conveyed to Norwegian Foreign Ministry for a delegation from Norway to meet Mr. Balasingham for third consecutive meeting in London scheduled for 4 February.

The LTTE had stated that it had sufficient arms and that the truce should be effective on land, sea and air every where without any obstacles. The other proposal by the LTTE was that LTTE cadres should be allowed free movement any where in the South in cleared areas during the truce and government wanted the LTTE to stay out of cleared areas as they may try to enlist new cadres which has been denied by LTTE that it had sufficient cadres in hand.

● **LTTE rejects child-recruitment charge:** 5 Feb - The LTTE denied allegations by Sri Lanka's President Kumaratunga that the organisation is engaged in the forcible recruiting of children for war effort under the guise of ceasefire. LTTE's Mr. Anton Balasingham rejected the accusation and said Kumaratunga was attempting create controversy and apprehensions with the intention of undermining the ongoing Norwegian peace initiative.

In a statement issued on 5 February, the Presidential Secretariat said, "The President of Sri Lanka is deeply concerned regarding reports that the LTTE is continuing the large-scale forcible recruitment of children."

But Mr. Balasingham accused President Kumaratunga of "deliberately distorting facts to slander the LTTE with the ultimate objective of scuttling the peace process."

Mr. Balasingham said that the LTTE is now actively recruiting young men and women above seventeen years of age to expand the movement's political and administrative wings. He said that amid intense efforts by the Norwegian government to advance the peace process, the movement had to prepare for the inevitable political and administrative demands that it can expect to face.

Pointing out that the 100,000 strong Sri Lanka Army is also engaged in substantial recruitment efforts at present, along with the Navy and Air Force, Mr. Balasingham said that the LTTE''s military section was also recruiting volunteers "to ensure the prevailing balance of forces is not altered disadvantageously."

"This recruitment by both sides at present does not in any way undermine the spirit of the unilateral cessations of hostilities being observed by the LTTE and the Sri Lanka armed forces," he said.

● **Maldives as venue for peace talks:** 6 Jan - The Sri Lankan government is reported to be considering the Maldives Islands as the venue for peace talks with the LTTE, reports from Colombo said. The LTTE earlier suggested South India as a venue but the Indian government responded negatively to the proposal. The LTTE has been requesting the venue for talks to be closed to Sri Lanka since the LTTE negotiating team would have to consult its leader Prabhakaran while the talks were taking place.

● **16 Muslims abducted, say Army:** 6 Jan - Sri Lankan military officials accused LTTE of abducting 16 Muslims for ransom near the eastern town of Muttur. The accusation was the latest in a series of incidents blamed on the Tigers. "Fifteen farmers were abducted on Tuesday night and one fisherman this morning," one military official said. Muttur is in government-held territory, but the rebels have been accused in the past of raising funds and recruiting personnel in such towns.

● **SLAF officers jailed:** 7 Feb - The Colombo High Court found guilty two Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) officers who had threatened to kill Mr.Iqbal Athas, Consultant Editor of the Sunday Times in February 1998, and sentenced them to nine years rigorous imprisonment. Delivering his order the High Court Judge Mr.Sarath Ambepitiya said, "Media personnel have the freedom to criticise any member of any rank of the society. The accused had committed the offence to prevent the complainant from exposing corruption and malpractice of the Sri Lanka Air Force."

The officers were also ordered to pay a fine of twenty thousand rupees each. In this case two Air Force Officers, Squadron Leader H.M.Rukman Herath and Squadron Leader D.S.P.Kannangara, had been indicted by the Attorney General for committing criminal trespass, intimidation and unlawful entry with weapons into Mr.Athas home on February 12,1998. At the time of committing the offence, the first accused Rukman Herath was the bodyguard of a former Air Force Commander Air Vice Marshall Oliver Ranasinghe The second accused was the officer in charge of the Special Air Borne Force of the SLAF. According to the prosecution, both the accused had threatened, harassed and intimidated the complainant for exposing the corruption and malpractice in the Sunday Times weekly newspaper.

● **Scandinavian monitors favoured:** 7 Feb - The LTTE has indicated to Norway, which is facilitating the peace process in Sri Lanka, that it would like Scandinavian countries to be included in a committee to monitor a proposed mutual ceasefire, an agreement which is under preparation. Government sources said the LTTE had suggested that Denmark and Sweden be included in a monitoring panel that would be set up to supervise the

ceasefire, adding that the matter was yet to be finalised.

● **Tamil civilian rights to be guaranteed:** 7 Feb - A guarantee from the LTTE on safeguarding rights of Tamil civilians in north-east Sri Lanka is to be incorporated in a proposed ceasefire agreement, cabinet spokesman Prof. G L Peiris said in Colombo. As a delegation from Norway led by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, arrived in Colombo and had discussions with the Government on the draft ceasefire agreement, The Minister G.L. Peiris, said at a press conference that the Government had conveyed to the LTTE through Norway, which is facilitating the peace process, its concern at reports of child conscription, extortion, abductions and killings by the group since the present truce began last Christmas. Mr. Peiris said this was one of the "priority issues" being discussed for incorporation into the final memorandum of understanding between the two sides. Another matter being discussed for the ceasefire was the security of members or sympathisers of non-LTTE Tamil groups, who have been constant targets of the LTTE. Reiterating that the Government was "very satisfied" with the progress on the ceasefire agreement, Mr. Peiris said what was important was that the agreement should be sound rather than quick.

● **LTTE may give up homeland demand:** 7 Feb - The "appeared to be willing" to give up their long-standing demand for a separate homeland following approaches from peace-broker Norway, the Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik said in an interview broadcast on 7 February. The Prime Minister told the BBC he was optimistic of bringing the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to the peace-negotiating table by the middle of this year. Bondevik said the "only realistic approach to any lasting peace agreement would be for the Tamil Tigers to give up their long-standing claim to the creation of a separate Tamil homeland". He added: "This they appeared to be willing to do." Bondevik said the Sri Lankan government must in return do a "great deal of work" to achieve equal conditions for minority Tamils.

● **PM to seek U.S. support for peace bid:** 7 Feb - Sri Lankan Prime Minster Ranil Wickremesinghe will visit Washington to seek American guarantee of support for his accelerated bid to push peace by negotiating with the LTTE. Wickremesinghe will visit Singapore next week and head for Washington soon after. Reports from Colombo said.

"President Bush has urged the Sri Lanka government to relentlessly pursue the effort to achieve peace regardless of possible obstacles, however formidable they are. The U.S. president has also promised to extend all possible assistance to wipe out terrorism here in the event of the LTTE turning intransigent or taking up too rigid a stance to abort the peace talks," the report said.

Analysts see the U.S. support as critical for the Wickremesinghe administration. They said Wickremesinghe would be looking for a virtual underwriting of the peace process. Previous attempts to hold negotiations ended in failure and intensified warfare resuming between government troops and the LTTE. The PM said in parliament recently that this was "the last chance for peace" the war-torn island had and that the Oslo peace bid had "international opinion as a safety net."

● **Discussion on political issues urged:** 8 Feb - The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka in a press release states, "Pronouncements by government spokespersons indicate that the government's primary objective in the current peace process is to keep the ceasefire going for as long as possible. While maintaining that the ceasefire is a laudable objective, the National Peace Council is concerned that such a narrow focus might undermine the peace process in the longer term. There is a need to deal with the substantive political issues that underlie the ethnic conflict as a whole, and go beyond simply stopping the fighting. International experience suggests that for the stability of the ceasefire, this interim period of ceasefire needs to be explicitly linked to a longer-term process in which the political solution would be negotiated.

"At present the government and LTTE appear to be satisfied not to push too soon to discuss the political issues. However, the danger exists of the two sides permitting the ceasefire to continue indefinitely without addressing the difficult political issues that underlie the ethnic conflict. The parties must be prepared to acknowledge the contentious political issues and make a commitment that they are prepared to deal with those issues that will lead to a political solution.

"While the gap between the government and LTTE on the political issues may be too wide to be bridged at this time, the National Peace Council calls on the two parties to take the first steps in this process. Recently there have been reports of forced recruitment and extortion by the LTTE, while hundreds of detainees continue to be held in government prisons without trial as LTTE suspects. There is a need for the government and LTTE to agree to strong human rights mechanisms that will eliminate such violations. "We welcome the prospects of a durable ceasefire agreement. It could make the gap in the positions of the government and LTTE more bridgeable in the years ahead. The prospect of resolving contentious political issues by safeguarding human rights and negotiating a durable and just political solution could become an important part of the motivation to maintain the ceasefire."

● **Thondaman resigns and rejoins cabinet:** 8 Feb - Leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) Arumugam Thondaman today resigned from the government along with all his party members. Mr. Thondaman, who held Housing and Plantation Infrastructure portfolio in the United National Party (UNP) led government, resigned along with his party colleagues after he found out that the nomination list for the forthcoming local government elections in Nuwara-Eliya district did not include CWC nominees as previously agreed. "Names of our members were tippexed out in the papers," Mr. Thondaman told newspapers accusing some regional leaders of the UNP of jeopardising the party's relationship with governing party. "We signed the nomination papers yesterday only after Prime Minister Wickremasinghe, UNP chairman Malik Samarawickrama and General Secretary Senarath Kapukotuwa agreed with our list of names. But when we went to the District Secretaries office this morning, our members names were missing."

However, Thondaman was soon back in the cabinet having withdrawn his resignation after consultation with the Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. "Prime Minister promised to appoint CWC members, who were to contest, to the local government bodies after the elections" Minister Thondaman told the press. The Prime Minister has ordered an inquiry into as to how the CWC members came to be dropped from the nomination list, nearly causing the collapse of the two-moth-old government. Those found to be responsible are likely to face disciplinary action.

● **Norwegians optimistic on peace talks:** 9 Feb - Norwegian diplomats wrapped up two days of talks aimed at ironing out a Memorandum of Understanding that could pave the way for direct talks between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tigers. The diplomats, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, met Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and opposition and minority leaders to discuss a draft agreement to formalise a ceasefire. Norway's team on 9 February briefed India on the state of their efforts with a meeting with the Indian Deputy High Commissioner Mohan Kumar.

● **Ratwatte questioned:** 9 Feb - The former Defence Minister, Anuruddha Ratwatte, was today questioned by police sleuths for his

alleged role in the violence that rocked the central district of Kandy on the day of the 2001 general election last year. Mr Ratwatte was asked to present himself to the Criminal Investigation Department today or face arrest. One of the allegations against Mr Ratwatte and his two sons is that they were involved in the massacre of 10 supporters of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Arrest warrants have been issued against his sons by a Kandy magistrate. Muslims in the town near which the killings took place last Dec. 5 protested today against the perceived delay in bringing the alleged culprits to book by blocking roads with burning tyres.

It is learnt that Ratwatte, who was grilled by detectives for nearly nine hours, denied any knowledge about a massacre of the Muslims, and also denied allegations about misuse of army personnel for illegal election activities in the central Kandy district.

● **Nimalarajan murder investigation:** 10 Jan - The Attorney General (AG) has directed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police to expedite the investigations into the murders of Mr.Maylvaganam Nimalarajan, a Jaffna based Tamil journalist and Mr.Kumar Ponnambalam, leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, legal sources said. The Attorney General would shortly review the progress of the investigations so far conducted by the CID in this regard, the sources said.

Human rights sources and several media institutions have criticized the way in which the investigations into these murders were conducted in the past.

Mr.Nimalarajan was gunned down by some unidentified persons in the Sri Lanka Army's high security zone in Jaffna on October 19, 2000. Mr.Nimalarajan fearlessly reported the intimidation, thuggery and election malpractice during October 2000 general elections in Jaffna.

Mr.Kumar Ponnambalam, ACTC leader was gunned down by some unidentified persons in the heart of Colomboin daytime on January 5, 2000. Tamil sources suspected the involvement of State security forces in Mr Ponnambalam's murder as he was fearlessly criticizing the government for human rights violation perpetrated on Tamil people. But no tangible progress has been made in the investigations to find the culprits behind these mystery killings so far even after two years have passed, Tamil sources said.

● **Govt-LTTE truce hits new snag:** 10 Feb – Reports from Colombo pointed to new Norway's attempts to broker a formal truce in Sri Lanka has hit new snags. The first one is that the LTTE wants the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government and the LTTE to carry the signature of President Chandrika Kumaratunga as she is the real head of state, though it is the new government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe that has been negotiating the contents of the MoU. "If Kumaratunga refuses, then LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran will also not sign it and relegate that duty to a senior deputy," said the privately run *Sunday Leader* weekly, quoting informed sources. The paper also said that Norway has proposed that both Kumaratunga and her arch political rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, sign the agreement "so that the ceasefire will have greater validity."

The newspaper also discussed at length the vital aspects of a draft MoU, but t the Norwegian embassy said no formal draft had been presented yet. "In light of the fact that parts of a draft have been circulated to the media, the Norwegian government would like to make it clear that no formal proposal so far has been presented to the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE," the embassy said in a one-paragraph statement.

Another issue is the government's reaction to the widespread reports of abductions, extortion and forcible recruitment of child soldiers, especially in the east of the country, allegedly by the LTTE. The government has raised this matter with the Norwegians and suggested the inclusion of a clause in the MoU binding the LTTE not to engage in such activities.

● **A9 highway to open as scheduled:** 11 Feb - In a statement issued in the Vanni on 10 February, the political wing of the Liberation Tigers said that the A9 highway and the Uyilankulam road in Mannar would be opened on Friday 15 February. The two roads would be the only access arteries to the LTTE held Vanni region. on which successive government in Colombo clamped a harsh economic embargo for more than a decade. The Vavuniya GA said that the district secretariat was ready for opening the A9 on 15 February.

● **LTTE Points to India' obligation:** 11 Feb – India has a moral obligation to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic problem. Calling on New Delhi to put aside the past and help in the peace process, he said the LTTE has already requested India, through the Norwegian facilitators, to host peace talks and permit their chief negotiator Anton Balasingham to be housed in India, S P Thamil Selvam, head of the LTTE's political wing said in Kilinochchi to a correspondent of the Times of India.

Thamil Selvan said that the Tamil Tigers were disappointed with Indian political parties and the Indian media for magnifying their request out of proportion. Asked why should India get involved in the peace process having burnt her fingers once, Thamil Selvan said New Delhi must bear in mind that at that time their government did not handle the issue correctly, but now there is another government in place which should take a different stance. "India lost one of its leaders but we must not forget that several hundreds of LTTE cadres and several thousands of Tamil people were killed by the very same force that came here," he said when asked why should India help a group that was found responsible for killing one of its leaders.

"If we go on digging into the past we will not be able to resolve any thing," he noted.

The LTTE's number two in command refused to make a commitment on the organisation's stance over their demand for a separate state but insisted that there had been no softening of their stance. "If a sensible government can sit down and re-think its process and make the people believe it is quite possible that we could live together, or rather the aspirations of the Tamil people could be realised in such a way that a change of mind may take place, it is only then we can work on the nitty-gritties of the solution," he said implying that the LTTE is now willing to consider other options to separatism.

Thamil Selvan said he had confidence in the new Sri Lankan government because it had been elected to power on a peace mandate, but added that the LTTE did not trust President Chandrika Kumratunga's commitment to peace. However, she could not be an impediment to the process because of the public mandate for peace, the new government's commitment and international pressure, he added.

Thamil Selvan said the bans imposed against their group by Western nations would have little impact because the Tamil diaspora would always find ways of contributing to a cause they firmly believed in.

● **UN team to check illegal guns:** 11 Jan - A United Nations disarmament team is in Sri Lanka to study the feasibility of implementing a guns-for-money programme to round up illegal weapons in the areas of Sri Lanka outside the northeast conflict zone. The four-member delegation, led by Joao Bernardo Honwana, chief of the conventional arms branch of the U.N. Disarmament Department, arrived in Colombo on 10 January.

Official sources said the mission, which is here at the invitation of the Government, had no connection to the ongoing peace process between the Government and the Tamil Tigers. Its only concern is with the proliferation of illegal arms in Sri Lanka's

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non-conflict zones against the backdrop of increasing crime and violence with guns, which peaked during the last elections. Sri Lanka is grappling with an acute proliferation of small arms in non-conflict zones and so far, attempts by the Government to collect them have not been successful. A recent amnesty offered by the new Interior Ministry for turning in unauthorised weapons produced nothing, but it is estimated that there are at least 20,000 illegal small arms, including automatic weapons, in circulation in southern Sri Lanka. The number of firearms in unauthorised hands in southern Sri Lanka has grown in direct proportion to the escalation of the war in northeast Sri Lanka, and contributed to rising crime statistics. The problem has become more acute with nearly 30,000 deserters from the armed forces.

The U.N. mission will be in Sri Lanka for 10 days, during which it will investigate the feasibility of a weapons-collection programme that will offer an economic incentive to all those who volunteer to surrender unauthorised weapons in their possession, sources said.

● **Sri Lanka lifts 15-year restrictions:** 11 Feb - The Government announced that no approval from the Ministry of Defence will be required hereafter by Sri Lankan citizens to travelling to Jaffna. "However their identities should be proved at the point of embarking when they travel by air or ship at security force/check points established by the Government", the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in a press statement released 11 February. The statement further states:

"Following guidelines as regards the air and sea passage to the North are to be adhered to with immediate effect. Requirement to obtain permission to proceed to Jaffna has been relaxed. Accordingly, (a) No approval from Ministry of Defence will be required hereafter by Sri Lankan citizens travelling to Jaffna. However, their identities should be proved at the point of embarking when they travel by air or ship at any Security Force/ Police checkpoints established by the Government. (b) All non- Sri Lankans should seek permission from the MOD to visit North.

However, any non- Sri Lankan who is recommended in writing after scrutiny for travel to Jaffna by Sri Lankan Ambassador/ High Commissioner abroad will be permitted access to the Jaffna without MOD approval. (c) Any Diplomatic Officials, stationed in Sri Lanka will not require permission from MOD to travel to the North. (d) Any Sri Lankan, non-Sri Lankan, Diplomat or anyone visiting uncleared areas (that are under the control of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) will do so at his/her own risk." The ministry also scrapped the requirement of obtaining its clearance to buy air tickets to travel to the government-held northern town of Jaffna.

Earlier, the defence ministry granted permission to cross frontlines only to a handful of diplomats and local residents after strict screening by security authorities. The restrictions had been in place from 1987.

Another major restriction due to be removed was a ban on fishing within a security zone in northern Sri Lanka where fishermen had no access because it was found that Tamil Tigers were infiltrating and carrying out attacks on security forces there. The Defence Ministry said it was allowing fishermen of the north to catch fish along the coastal belt between Thondamanaru and Point Pedro. Fishermen will be allowed to use only non-mechanised boats and catch fish up to a half kilometre from the beach daily from 4.30 am until 6.00 pm. On Sundays they will be allowed up to one and half kilometres from the beach. A considerable section of the population in northern Sri Lanka depend on fishing for their livelihood, but have been denied access due to escalated fighting during the past few years.

In addition, the government has decided to permit passengers using the ship between the north eastern port city harbour of Trincomalee to the northern Point Pedro harbour to travel without any security clearance. Earlier civilians had to follow cumbersome procedures to get security clearance before travelling. In a related development the government has decided to operate the northern Point Pedro jetty in Jaffna till 10 p.m. enabling an increase in the quantum of supplies that can be unloaded from ships.

The government has announced these sweeping measures amid optimistic reports concerning the progress in the current peace process facilitated by Norway.

● **Norwegian Team Back in London:** 12 Feb – Norwegian peace delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, following its visit to Colombo where it had discussions with government leaders, visited London and completed another round of talks with the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham. It was expected that the team's discussions with Mr Balasingham centred on finalising the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be signed separately by the warring parties.

● **Australia deports 39 illegal SL immigrants:** 12 Feb - In a statement issued yesterday, the Australian High Commission in Colombo quoting Australian government sources said that 39 Sri Lankans who had entered Australia illegally have been deported. The statement said that this would serve as a warning to other Sri Lankans attempting to enter Australia bypassing legal procedure.

Five Sri Lankan's travelling in a boat were detected last Christmas by the Australian authorities trying to illegally enter the country through the Coco Islands. Those involved in the incident were charged with people smuggling, an offence that carries upto 20 years imprisonment or a fine of 220,000 Australian dollars or both.

● **De-mining of A9 highway to Jaffna completed:** 12 Feb - The Army is scheduled to complete the de-mining of the A9 highway from Kandy to Jaffna by 14 February for the road to be used by civilians when it is opened for such use from the following day.

Military spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, said the road would be opened as scheduled on Friday February 15. He said the army had not found any mines along the main entry points into Jaffna. He reiterated however that over 600 anti personnel mines and anti tank mines had been detected at Omanthai and were being removed by the Army. He added the road is being cleared according to the requirements of the International Committee of the Red Cross and would be ready for transportation and use from the 15th. The LTTE too are working simultaneously to de-mine areas under their control and are reported to have removed a large number of anti personnel mines also at Omanthai in the Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE too have in a statement have said that the highway would be cleared and ready for opening on February 15.

● **Army deserters held for gang-raping:** 13 Feb - Four Sri Lankan army deserters were arrested on Tuesday in connection with the reported gang rape of a British woman tourist eight days ago, police said. The men were taken into custody at the eastern town of Polonnaruwa where the woman was raped, police said. A locally made gun, cash and stolen goods were found with the suspects.

● **Cabinet to be expanded:** 13 Jan - The United National Front government is expected to expand its cabinet today after weeks of continuous pressure and political blackmail by some of the new ministers. The new recruits, who will be given full cabinet rank are Karunasena Kodituwakku (education), Rajitha Senaratne (lands), Mahinda Samarasinghe (employment), Ravi Karunanayake (consumer affairs), Imtiaz Bakker Markar (mass communications), P. Chandrasekera (estate infrastructure) and Milinda Moragaoda (economic reforms). With this additional intake, the cabinet will now swell to 30.

● **Restrictions on medical supplies lifted:** 13 Feb - The Defence Ministry announced today that it was lifting controls on the transportation of medicine and medical equipment to areas under the control of the LTTE. The Ministry said that no approval was necessary for the transportation such items. However the goods will be checked by military check points in the border areas.

● **Muslims protest against abductions:** 14 Feb - Thousands of enraged Muslims protested in eastern Sri Lanka today against a reported wave of abductions blamed on Tamil Tigers. The abductions, mostly for ransom, have cast a shadow over a Norwegian-brokered peace process that has brought the government and the LTTE to their first peace talks in seven years. Residents burnt tyres and shut down shops in the town of Muttur in protest after four Muslims were kidnapped on 13 February. "The four were found this morning severely beaten up,'" a police officer said. Residents accuse the Tigers of at least 16 other abductions, all members of the Muslim minority in the east. ❑

International Opinion or National Consensus?

Kethesh Loganathan

The policy statement by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe made in parliament on recently is a forthright admission of the reality that the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are under close scrutiny by the international community in how they work out a solution to the on-going war.

He says, "International opinion compels us in this direction. This compulsion is not only limited to the Government of Sri Lanka but is also compelling on the LTTE." He has pointed out that "the concern of India as well as donor countries has been drawn towards this problem today more than ever before. They steadfastly advocate a political solution to the war. In this context the centre of attention is international opinion. A solution to the North East problem will be through international opinion."

If the Sri Lankan State and the LTTE have come under considerable international pressure, it is primarily because of the failure of our national polity and society in shaping a just and equitable solution to the Tamil question. Far too many opportunities were squandered and far too many wrong turns were taken at critical crossroads due to narrow partisan politics and rank chauvinism.

The LTTE also failed to subordinate its immediate organisational interests to the wider interests of the people that it represents. The protracted ethnic conflict had its ramifications across the Palk Strait and internationally in the form of refugees, and came to be reflected in an increasing international concern over violations of human rights and international humanitarian norms by both parties to the conflict. The international opinion and close scrutiny that soon came to prevail on the Sri Lankan State and the LTTE were, hence, inevitable. However, what is of concern to this writer is that an excessive sensitivity to international opinion could manifest itself in both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government playing to the international "gallery", rather than addressing each other on substantive issues. The Premier's policy statement is totally silent regarding the identification of the causes that led to the ethnic conflict. There is no reference to an ethnic question. There is only reference to the North-East war and the stalemate. To quote: "The objective of the LTTE in setting up a separate state in the North East by chasing away the security forces has not succeeded. Likewise we have not been successful in completely eliminating the LTTE through a military solution. This is the present status of the war".

The war, however, is only a manifestation of a deep-rooted problem. The policy statement does not give any indication as regards the broad contours of a political solution that the Government is prepared to give the people of the North-East. All that it says is that the "majority of the people's wish is to work towards a solution through devolution of power democratically, ensuring the territorial integrity of the country and preserving the rights of all sections of the people".

Perhaps, it is premature at the present stage of the peace process to get into substantive issues. There could also be a legitimate fear that the process itself may get derailed by getting into contentious areas. Yet, this writer is of the opinion that a policy statement should have given some indication of the recognition of an unresolved Tamil question.

There is also a real danger that the peace process could end up as a contest between the Government and the LTTE for international support for their respective cause or project. In other words, the Government and the LTTE may well formulate a negotiating strategy aimed at exposing the bad faith of the "other" to ensure that it has international opinion on its side when talks collapse and fighting begins. This, in fact, has been the mindset of successive governments and the LTTE in the past when it comes to negotiations.

The Premier's policy statement could well be an unfortunate manifestation of the mindset of his advisors who may be confusing negotiations skills with outwitting the "other" and playing to the international gallery. Or, it could well be a brilliant move to mobilise domestic support for de-proscription and talks with the LTTE. Or, may be both.

But, in the final analysis, international opinion without a corresponding national consensus and reconciliation cannot be a basis for a durable solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. While the international community should continue to exert maximum pressure on the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to observe international humanitarian norms and human rights and arrive at a negotiated settlement to the ethnic question, the burden lies with forces within Sri Lanka in shaping the contours and content of such an agreement. Failing which, any solution may have to be imposed and guaranteed from the outside. It is for us to choose.

(Courtesy: The Sunday Times, Colombo)

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Contours for a Ceasefire

D.B.S.JEYARAJ

Significant forward movement on the road to peace in Sri Lanka was recorded when Norwegian deputy foreign affairs minister Vidar Helgesen arrived in Colombo on February 7th. He was leading a peace delegation consisting of special adviser to the foreign ministry Erik Solheim and ministry official Kjirste Tromsdal. The Norwegians engaged in a hectic brand of shuttle diplomacy between Europe and Asia had a tangible document in their hands when they arrived in Colombo this time. It was the draft Memorandum of Understanding outlining conditions and rules for a ceasefire that would hopefully be signed soon by both the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The primary purpose of this draft MOU was to bring about a permanent and durable ceasefire to replace the parallel ones in place now. Both the LTTE and Government are adhering to their respective unilaterally declared cessation of hostility separately. These are extended on a monthly basis. The ceasefires in force are applicable to land based activity alone. The Norwegian focus has been to harmonise the situation and evolve a structured and comprehensive ceasefire covering all types of land, sea and air based activity in addition to related issues.

Wide and Intense Consultation

The draft was formulated after active consultation with both parties. Although the "form" belonged to Norway the "content" was that of the Sri Lankan government and LTTE. The Norwegians had dutifully incorporated all suggestions, proposals and amendments put forward by both sides in the document after of course intense debate and discussion. Proposals that emanated during discussions with President Kumaratunga and former Foreign Affairs minister Lakshman Kadirgamar have also been relied upon.

The Norwegians have also drawn extensively from input provided by officials and diplomats from countries committed to a lasting peace in Sri Lanka. India in particular had been regularly consulted and informed of the progress of the peace process.Norway would like to give effect to this MOU inspired ceasefire before Feb 24th when the month long self – imposed ceasefires by both sides are scheduled to lapse. Yet there is no rigid deadline or undue haste to force the pace of events accordingly.So it may be signed even later.

The primary purpose of the seven page draft MOU is to ensure a stable and structured ceasefire. The wisdom of hindsight concerning the past where a number of factors led to ceasefire collapses has been utilised to the maximum. The attitude of cautious optimism of both sides have helped greatly in this. The initial idea of a time bound ceasefire for one year has been shelved. Instead it would have no time constraints and be open ended. The ceasefire would not automatically come into force the moment it is signed. Instead a definite date would be stipulated for it to be activated in practice.

Conditions and deadlines

Both sides are expected to set in motion certain measures from D-day or the day that the ceasefire comes into operation. These measures are yet to be finalised completely but both sides are obliged to fulfil some of the conditions in 30 and others within 60 days of the ceasefire coming into force. This would be on a reciprocal, staggered basis with one condition being predicated on implementation of the other.

These conditions and deadlines are not expected to be problematic as both sides have already commenced unilateral efforts in implementing some already. Two noteworthy examples being the requirement of lifting the economic embargo on the government side and the opening of the A - 9 highway or Jaffna -Kandy road by the LTTE. Much progress has been achieved in these already.

The ceasefire would be applicable to land, sea and air based activity. This entails a number of provisions some of which are to be finalised. In a nutshell the armed forces cannot launch assault operations, shelling, aerial and naval bombardment, cordon and search operations, arbitrary arrests etc. The LTTE cannot conduct operations like frontal assaults, suicide strikes or explosive attacks in the entire Island inclusive of Colombo. They are debarred from activities like political assassinations too. Likewise the government cannot allow its deep penetration units known as "Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol"s to target LTTE leaders.

The applicability of the ceasefire to the air and sea spheres would help the Tamil fisherfolk greatly. This unfortunate sector has been deprived of its traditional livelihood for the given reason of protecting naval installations, vessels and also aircraft from sea based tiger attacks, With the ceasefire coming into force effectively the rationale for the fishing ban is expected to cease.The LTTE is specifically forbidden to conduct over or undersea strikes at marine or airborne targets. There is some opposition from naval circles to lifting the fishing ban entirely. The Tigers however demand a total removal.

Monitoring mechanism

A vital aspect of the draft MOU is the mechanism to monitor the ceasefire and more importantly prevent its hasty collapse. It would be known as the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) A crucial feature of this monitoring panel is the fact that it would also function as a dispute solving reconciliatory mechanism. The panel's emphasis would not be that of detecting violations, accepting violation complaints and reprimanding offenders. Instead the focus would be conflict resolution. If and when complaints are received or violations detected the committee will

delve into the matter and arrive at amicable settlements.

The Monitoring commission is mandated with authority to take prompt and "immediate action on complaints made by either party, to inquire into and assist in the settlement of any dispute". The idea is to resolve prickly issues at the lowest possible level without allowing them to escalate. The goal of the Monitoring mission is to help sustain the ceasefire rather than be a destructive instrument.

In this respect it must be emphasised that it would not be possible for either party to take offence over an issue and break off from the ceasefire easily and quickly. A minimum of 14 days notice of such intention and reasons should be given to the panel. The monitors will inquire into the reasons and attempt as far as possible to address grievances thereby preventing a collapse It would not be possible for breakdowns over trivial issues as in the past. Thus the institution would be more of a ceasefire maintaining than monitoring mission.

The monitoring panel would be divided up into six separate decentralised units for functional purposes. All the units described as "advisory" would be integrated and coordinated by a central regulating committe whose head will report to the Norwegian government. This person would be responsible for the overall truce monitoring and will have a support staff. He or she will be answerable to Oslo in the line of duty. The committee will have foreign and domestic representatives. A Norwegian national with extensive knowledge and experience of Sri Lanka is tipped to be the head of the monitoring mission. The mission will have offices in Colombo and Mallavi in the Tiger controlled territory.

District-wise monitoring

The main theatre of conflict the North-Eastern Province comprises eight administrative districts with Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitheevu in the North and Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Amparai or Digamadulla as it is known now in the East. The ceasefire envisages these eight districts being reduced to six for monitoring purposes. In the East the Batticaloa and Amparai districts would be treated as one composite district. Geographic considerations have influenced this decision. Thus there would only be two districts in the East for this purpose namely the Trincomalee and Batticaloa-Amparai districts.

In the North the Mullaitheevu and Kilinochchi districts would be regarded as one unit. Both districts are under near total control of the LTTE thereby reducing scope for much friction. Thus the North would have four districts for purposes of ceasefire monitoring namely Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya and Kilinochchi-Mullaitheevu. Thus there will only be six "districts" in the North-East region as far as the monitoring mission is concerned. District monitoring advisory committees comprising domestic and foreign representatives will be set up to oversee the truce.

Each district panel will have two representatives each from the government and LTTE sides. These 24 per-

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sons are expected to be eminent persons capable of discharging their duties without fear or favour. The ceasefire MOU will not decide on the government and LTTE representatives. Both sides are free to choose their nominees subject to approval by the other side. In addition there would be international representatives heading the committees. It is likely that there would be only a single foreign representative in most districts.

As far as the foreign component is concerned the representatives are likely to be from Scandinavian and Nordic countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and the autonomous territory of Greenland etc. The bulk of the representatives are likely to be from Norway and Sweden. The concerns of all parties concerned have been taken into account over the politically sensitive aspect of international representatives. The "neutral" choice of Scandinavian and Nordic nations seems acceptable to all including India.

Territorial control frozen

The ceasefire envisages clearly demarcated zones of control by both parties. This would in effect freeze the current status quo of territorial control. The respective lines of control will be clearly demarcated and areas segregated. There would be a "buffer zone" of at least a 600 metres distance separating the respective forward defence lines. Movement of troops and cadres into this "no man's land" would be allowed up to a maximum of 100 metres from their respective lines of control. Both sides would be expected to exercise restraint even if and when this dividing line is crossed occasionally. However, both sides would retain the right to fire upon the other side if this violation was deemed serious enough to anticipate danger.

There is incidentally no demand by the LTTE to get security forces move back to earlier pre-war positions or withdraw from the Tamil areas under their control. The troops however will be required to relocate within spheres of control gradually to facilitate normalcy. Thus security personnel stationed in places of worship, schools, community centres and halls, manufacturing plants, government offices and buildings etc will have to vacate these premises as civilian life gradually returns to normalilty. They will be relocated to accredited military venues but not withdrawn from the area.

The controls exercised by the armed forces and LTTE over civilians are expected to be reduced if not relaxed totally as normal life returns. Codes of conduct for both sides to follow will be introduced to maximise civilian safeguards and rights. The present draft debars both sides from engaging in hostile acts against the civilian population. Some acts specified are "torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment".

There will also be regulations guaranteeing freedom of movement of cadres and troops from either side into the other area of control. An important requirement is prior permission. The LTTE will allow unarmed security personnel free movement in its sphere of control. The Tigers are required to open the A-9 highway within 30 days of the ceasefire coming into force and enable unarmed troops right of passage within 60 days. This is expected to be a boon for soldiers proceeding to and from their homes on leave. At present this is a major logistical problem for the armed forces causing much heartburn for soldiers.

Similiarly LTTE cadres "as individual combatants, unarmed and out of uniform are to be allowed to visit friends and relatives living in areas of control of the other party on a restricted basis".Unarmed tiger cadres can also visit "government controlled areas for purposes of political work". This however is a contentious issue and there is pressure to delete the provision from the present draft.

Recruitment and acquisition of arms

There is also no restriction on recruitment or acquisition of arms by either side in the present draft. The agreement allows both sides to recruit for "exclusively for the purpose of maintaining the forces strength and status as they were" before Dec 24th last year. The current parallel ceasefires came into force from that date. Thus the Sri Lankan army is free to recruit and train more personnel while the LTTE can also do the same. The Tigers have stated that they will recruit volunteers over 17 years of age for administrative and political purposes. As far as arms acquisition is concerned there are two viewpoints. One is that the navy be allowed to engage in "defensive action "by being allowed to intercept suspicious vessels that could be transporting arms to the LTTE. The general provision in the draft about the Sri Lankan armed forces having the right to "perform their legitimate task of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Sri Lanka is invoked in this connection. Colombo is emphasising this and the need to restrict fishing rights. The LTTE naturally opposes this and wants for them unrestricted marine movement during the ceasefire.

This is another point that needs to be resolved before finalising a ceasefire. The crux of the matter is that with or without specific clauses both sides will be enhancing their arsenals. Attempting to dwell too much on this aspect can distort the chief objectives of the ceasefire into coast patrolling exercises. The hope is that both sides will be realistic enough to accept the inevitable. A stable ceasefire could alter the climate so drastically that such recourse to arms in the future may be negated. Besides the emphasis on reconstruction and development will affect priorities. It is unclear as to how both sides will reconcile their differences in the final MOU.

The details of the draft ceasefire were officially revealed to New Delhi when the Norwegian delegation briefed Acting High Commissioner Mohan Kumar in Colombo of the latest developments. One crucial aspect that remains unclear at this juncture concerns who the signatories to the ceasefire MOU will be. That however will become clear when the MOU reaches the final stage.

It must be noted that the ceasefire draft is subject to changes as more discussions with the parties concerned occur. The essence of it however is expected to remain unchanged. There are however several issues that have to be ironed out before a final document is formulated. In that context hopes of a permanent ceasefire materialising soon are quite high. ❐

Focus on Human Rights

● RAPE IN CUSTODY

The following are extracts from the report titled 'Sri Lanka: Rape in Custody' dated 28 January 2002(ASA37/001/2002) by London-based human rights organisation, Amnesty International:

Rape - a common violation

In Sri Lanka, like in many other countries, incidents of rape in the context of armed conflict such as the above examples are reported on a regular basis. During 2001, Amnesty International has noted a marked rise in allegations of rape by police, army and navy personnel.

Among the victims of rape by the security forces are many internally displaced women, women who admit being or having been members of the LTTE and female relatives of members or suspected male members of the LTTE. Some reports of rape in custody concern children as young as 14.

Alarmed at the apparent rise in reports of rape, Amnesty International on 4 April 2001 wrote to the President of Sri Lanka urging her to take action to stop rape by security forces and bring perpetrators to justice. The appeal followed reports of rape by security forces in Mannar, Batticaloa, Negombo and Jaffna, including the rape of Sinnathamby Sivamany and Ehamparam Wijikala described below. To date, no response has been received to the appeal.

In March 2000, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women (hereafter the Special Rapporteur), who herself is a Sri Lankan national, expressed grave concern over the lack of serious investigation into allegations of gang rape and murder of women and girls. The Special Rapporteur expressed the hope that every effort would be made to prevent further violations through the investigation of alleged incidents and the prosecution of alleged perpetrators in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. In its response, the government provided details regarding the progress of investigations into two of four individual cases raised by the Special Rapporteur. It also stated that "every case of alleged criminal conduct committed by the armed forces and police has been investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted, although there may have been unavoidable legal delays". Contrary to the government's assertion, to Amnesty International's knowledge, not a single member of the security forces has been brought to trial in connection to incidents of rape in custody although one successful prosecution has been brought in a case where the victim of rape was also murdered. An analysis of the cases in which investigations were conducted and trial proceedings initiated suggests that the authorities are far more inclined to take action if there is a considerable amount of public pressure.

The crime of rape

Under international law, rape committed by government officials or armed political groups during armed conflict constitutes torture. Rape and other serious sexual assault have also long been recognized as breaches of international humanitarian law. They are now recognized as a war crime and, when committed on a systematic basis or large scale, a crime against humanity. As such, it is subject to universal jurisdiction.

In Sri Lanka, in 1995 and 1998, through the Penal Code (Amendment) Act Nos. 22 of 1995 and 29 of 1998, the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, No. 28 of 1998; the Judicature (Amendment) Act, No. 27 of 1998 and the Evidence (Special Provision) Act of 1999, the government has put in place a legal framework which in principle should allow a more effective prosecution of alleged rapists.

Among the changes to the Penal Code was the inclusion of a new provision (Section 364(2)) recognizing the phenomena of rape in custody and gang rape as acts constituting grave crimes. The minimum and maximum punishment for rape in custody as a form of aggravated rape is 10 years' and 20 years' imprisonment respectively.

In addition, Sri Lanka is a party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It acceded to the Convention in 1994 and an Act was passed in parliament in November 1994 giving effect to Sri Lanka's obligations under the Convention. The Act made torture punishable by imprisonment for a term not less than seven years and not exceeding ten years, and a fine.

As stated above, despite these welcome changes to the legal framework, no perpetrators of *rape in custody* have so far been brought to justice. In relation to both torture and rape, Amnesty International is concerned about the failure of the authorities to bring to justice those members of the security forces suspected of being responsible for torture, including rape, in custody.

The new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe which came to power after winning parliamentary elections in early December 2001 has not so far made any policy announcements affecting the issues described in this document. However, the election manifesto of the main political party in power, the United National Party, contains commitments to "enact laws relating to the Women's Charter to safeguard women's rights" and to "ensure that women's particular requirements and gender-specific concerns are recognized and prioritized in the formulation of state policies."

Reason for failure of rape investigations

The most important reason for the lack of successful prosecutions of those allegedly responsible for rape in custody is that those responsible for the investigation (i.e. the police) are colleagues of the alleged perpetrators. As stated in the Amnesty International report *Sri Lanka: Torture in custody* (AI Index: ASA 37/10/99) of June 1999, "in order to eradicate torture ... there remains a need to establish a simple procedure which allows torture by the police or other law enforcement personnel to be investigated by an independent authority with the necessary powers and expertise required to ensure prosecutions for torture can be successfully brought". This is equally valid in relation to rape in custody.

There are many additional reasons why criminal investigations into complaints of rape are generally unsuccessful. Among them are:

- threats by the perpetrators against the victim and/or the witnesses;
- inadequate medical evidence due to poor quality of initial medical examination (in itself sometimes caused by threats to the doctor) or due to delay in taking the victim to a doctor;
- lack of independence of the investigating authority: police investigating police or members of the security forces;
- slow action by the local authority (normally the police) to investigate;
- political or other pressure brought to bear on the investigators;
- the victim withdraws the complaint or stops her cooperation with the investigations, under pressure from her family or community in the context of a traditional stigma associated with rape;
- transfer of the case to a court a long distance away from the victim's home;
- the police fears to act against alleged perpetrators belonging to the security forces.

Below are some examples of how these issues have arisen over the last few years:

Ida Carmelita was a former member of the LTTE who had surrendered to the police about a month before she was gang raped and killed by five soldiers at Pallimunai, Mannar district on 12 July 1999. She had been shot through her vagina. In his report, the DMO in Mannar documented evidence of rape and sexual violence, including bites on her breasts and lips. Two of the suspects had been recognized by a neighbour and another by the brother of the

victim. A corporal and a soldier were identified at an identification parade by witnesses and taken into custody. However, after two key witnesses were threatened and subsequently fled to India, the case is no longer proceeding. The suspects have been released on bail.

The UN Special Rapporteur in March 2000 highlighted the case of **Sarathambal Saravanbavananthakurukal**, a 29-year-old Tamil woman who had been reportedly gang raped and then killed by navy soldiers on 28 December 1999 in Pungudutivu, near Jaffna. She observed that despite an order by the President of Sri Lanka to immediately investigate the events, it was reported that "very little [was] being done to pursue the matter". Sarathambal Saravanbavananthakurukal had been abducted from her home, situated at about 500m from a navy camp. Her father and brother were tied up by four security officers dressed in black. Her dead body was found on barren land about 100m away from their home the next day. After public protest, her body was sent to Colombo for post-mortem by a senior JMO who indicated that the cause of death was "asphyxia due to gagging"; that her underpants had been stuffed inside her mouth; and that "forcible sexual intercourse" had taken place. The father and brother were allegedly threatened not to reveal the identity of the four men who came to the house. According to the Director of the Criminal Investigation Department, who had been instructed by the President of Sri Lanka to investigate the rape and murder, the brother had "not been able to identify any of the four persons who came to the house".

The criminal investigations into the rape and murder of both Ida Carmelita and Sarathambal Saravanbavananthakurukal have not proceeded beyond the initial inquiry stage. No charges have been filed against the alleged perpetrators and it is unlikely that those responsible for the rape and murder of the two women will ever be brought to justice.

Seventy-year-old **Poomani Saravanai**, an internally displaced widow, was raped by two soldiers at Neervely, Jaffna district in front of her son on 31 May 2000. The next day, she courageously made a complaint at the Atchelu army camp. She was able to identify the two soldiers on that day. It is reported that they were sacked from the army. However, nothing further was done at this crucial initial stage. It was not until 5 and 6 June that Poomani Saravanai was taken to a DMO. By then no evidence of rape could be found. To Amnesty International's knowledge, the police did not initiate any action against the two soldiers.

The Case of Sivamany and Wijikala

Sinnathamby Sivamany (aged 24) and **Ehamparam Wijikala** (aged 22), two Tamil women internally displaced by the ongoing armed conflict in the north and east of Sri Lanka, were arrested by members of the navy in the coastal city of Mannar on 19 March 2001. They were subsequently raped by navy personnel and members of the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) of the police at the office of the Counter-Subversive Unit (CSU) of the police along Pallimunai Road, approximately 500 metres outside Mannar town.

Wijikala's partner and the 6-year-old son of Sivamany were also taken into custody. They were all taken to the CSU office in a white van. Wijikala, in a petition to the Supreme Court, alleges that she and her partner were taken inside the CSU office. Her partner was locked in a cell, she was taken into a separate room. The Officer-in-Charge (OIC) was also there in the room. He asked her to sit on the floor and she complied. The OIC then asked a male police officer named Rajah to bring a piece of cloth. Rajah blindfolded her with the piece of cloth. She was told to remove her clothes. When she refused she was beaten and her clothes were forcibly removed by them. Then, while some of them held her hands and legs one person got on top of her, soon afterwards followed by another one. She said they both raped her.

Sivamany has testified that soon after Wijikala and her partner had been taken into the CSU office, a navy personnel came to the van and took away her son. Another navy officer then climbed into the van and blindfolded her with a sock aided by the driver of the van. Then this officer forcibly removed her clothes and raped her. After about 15 minutes he left the van. Some time after that she was taken inside the CSU office to the room in which Wijikala was being held and the security forces personnel present there beat her demanding that she remove her clothes. When she refused, Rajah ordered Wijikala to remove Sivamany's clothes. Both women were made to parade naked in front of the men. They were then made to sit in a crouched position; their hands and legs were tied and attached to a pole which was then placed between two tables so they were left hanging. They were in this position for about 90 minutes and were pinched and beaten with a thick wire during that time.

The victims were threatened with further torture unless they signed a statement admitting they were members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Both women signed such statements.

Sivamany and Wijikala were taken to the District Medical Officer (DMO) of Mannar district on 22 March. It is not clear why the police did this but it may have been an attempt to pervert any future investigations. Apparently due to threats from the CSU officers taking them to hospital and the fact that the officers remained present throughout the time in the DMO's office, both women refused to be examined. In his medico-legal examination form of 22 March 2001, however, the DMO ticked the "no injuries" box instead of indicating that he in fact had not carried out any medical examination.

The two women were produced before the local magistrate at his bungalow on 27 March - eight days after their arrest. On the instructions of the magistrate and after the case had attracted a lot of publicity and non-governmental organizations and church leaders raised concern, the women were once again taken to the DMO for a medical examination on 30 March. This time, the DMO found marks on their bodies, including semi-circular abrasions consistent with nail marks on the elbows, forearms and wrists of Wijikala. He concluded that she had been tortured and raped and that Sivamany was tortured and sexually assaulted. Rape could not be established. The magistrate later ordered an examination by a Judicial Medical Officer (JMO, senior to a DMO) in Colombo after the prison authorities informed him that the two women alleged they were raped. The JMO carried out his examination 18 days after the rape. He confirmed several injuries sustained due to the alleged torture inflicted on them and concluded that while "there were no positive findings to establish sexual intercourse", it "cannot be ruled out as the absence of positive findings may be due to the fact that [they were] married with children and [that there had been a] 18 day delay" from the time of the alleged rape to the time of the examinations.

Although the magistrate had ordered the police to investigate the allegations of rape and arrest the suspects, local police had not acted on his instructions. After widespread protests, and after the then Minister of Justice and Chairman of the Committee to Inquire into Undue Arrest and Harassment ordered the police to investigate and arrest the suspects, police finally took action.(This Committee, comprising five ministers and three MPs was set up in July 1998 by the President). Twelve police officers and two navy officers were arrested. They were identified by the women during an identification parade. At the time of writing, no charges had been filed and the preliminary trial proceedings had not started. All alleged perpetrators had been released on bail. It is feared that in this case, like many other similar ones, those allegedly responsible for rape in custody will never be brought to justice.

Some recent cases of rape in custody

*** Thambipillai Thanalakshmi**, 42-year-old Tamil woman from Meesalai, Jaffna district was reportedly dragged from her home at around 8.30pm on 7 July 2001 by soldiers allegedly attached to the Kachchai army camp. They took her to a nearby rice field where she was raped by at least three of them.

The victim's mother tried to intervene

after hearing her daughter screaming, but was assaulted and hit with rifles by the soldiers. The victim and her mother had been displaced from their home and had returned to resettle, only two months before the incident.

On the next morning, they lodged a complaint at Kachchai army camp and at Kodikamam police station. Police from Kodikamam visited the scene and reportedly recovered parts of Thanalakshmi's clothing from the rice field. Even though they had gone to the army camp early in the morning, it was not until around 6.30pm on 8 July that Thanalakshmi was taken by the police to the Mantikai hospital for medical examination. Medical personnel there reportedly confirmed evidence of rape.

After an intervention by senior police in Colombo, three soldiers were arrested and produced before the magistrate on 13 July. At the time of writing, to Amnesty International's knowledge, no charges had been filed against them.

* **Velu Arshadevi**, a Tamil woman of Indian origin, who was living in a boarding house in Colombo, was allegedly raped by three policemen on 24 June 2001. She had been stopped at a checkpoint on the Maradana-Borella Road, Colombo on 23 June 2001 while she was returning from work with a friend. Her identity was checked by the security forces personnel on duty at the checkpoint.

The next day, at around 3am, two police personnel without weapons and an armed soldier attached to that checkpoint came to the lodgings where the victim was staying. They said they had come for a "routine checking". After interrogating all the persons staying at that place, they returned to her room and told her that "since was a Tamil, she was not allowed to stay" there. She was told she had to go with them to the Maradana police station. The friend who had also been staying in the same place accompanied her for safety reasons.

While *en route* to the police station, they stopped at the Maradana - Borella Road checkpoint. Her friend was told to purchase some tea for the security forces and sent away. After he had gone, two police personnel took her to a staircase situated next to a bunker below road level. She was taken down there and made to lean against the wall and then raped.

Later that day, she made a complaint to the Maradana police station. The Officer-in-Charge produced her before the JMO on the same day. In his medical report, the JMO confirmed that rape had taken place.

After an identification parade was held by police, three police officers and three soldiers were arrested in connection with this crime. They have since been released on bail. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no charges have been filed against the alleged perpetrators.

* **Mahendiran Nageswari**, 37-year-old female from Kaluthawalai, was sexually abused by personnel of the Special Task Force (STF, paramilitary police unit) attached to the STF camp at Kaluthawalai, and admitted to the Batticaloa teaching hospital. According to the police post at the hospital, this matter was reported to the Kaluwanchikudy police station for further inquiries. It is alleged that the STF personnel went to her house and harassed her with the intention of molesting her.

* **Vijayaratnam Subashini**, an 19-year-old Tamil woman, was reportedly sexually assaulted by more than ten navy personnel, on 20 April 2001.

According to the reports received by Amnesty International, Subashini was on an LTTE boat returning from the open sea when several Sri Lanka navy gunboats surrounded them. There was fierce fighting for several hours. Subashini and many others jumped in the sea, after their boats were damaged, and then she was taken into one of the navy gunboats. Immediately after she got in the gunboat, all her clothes were removed, she was blindfolded and her hands were tied behind her back. More than ten navy personnel touched and squeezed her breasts, and her genital area. They allegedly also one by one put their fingers inside her vagina, while she was screaming. The whole ordeal lasted about two hours. When the boat reached Trincomalee her clothes were given to her. She is currently held without charge or trial at Welikade women's prison, Colombo. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no investigation has been held into this allegation.

* **Thangiah Vijayalalitha**, a 14-year-old Tamil girl, was sexually assaulted by more than ten navy personnel on 20 April 2001 when she was taken into custody during an LTTE operation in the open sea (see also the above case of Vijayaratnam Subashini).

Vijayalalitha was reportedly taken into a navy gunboat and her skirt and bra were removed. When the boat reached Trincomalee her clothes were returned to her. She is currently held without charge or trial at Welikade women's prison, Colombo.

* **Yogalingam Vijitha** is a 27-year-old Tamil woman from Kayts, Jaffna district. She was allegedly tortured, including raped with a plantain tree flower (hard cone-like, approximately 8-inch long) while in detention in the Negombo police station, between 21 and 27 June 2000.

According to the reports, she was beaten with poles on her knees, back, chest and the lower abdomen. She was trampled with boots on. She was forced to lie on a table and pins were inserted under the nails of her fingers and toes. She was slapped on her ears. On another occasion all her clothing, except her underwear, was removed and her face was covered with a polythene bag filled with chilli powder and petrol. Then she was asked to sign a statement written in Sinhalese, but when she refused, a plantain tree flower sprinkled with chilli powder was inserted into her vagina. After about 15 minutes, she fainted.

The victim claims she can identify at least one of the policemen who tortured her in the Negombo police station. She was produced in the Colombo Chief Magistrate Court, on 21 July 2000, and the magistrate ordered that she be examined by the JMO, Colombo North. The medical report confirmed that there had been vaginal penetration, that there "many scars on her limbs and torso" and that she was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder and depression, all of which could have resulted from the torture inflicted on her as alleged.

A fundamental rights petition was filed in March 2001 and is awaiting judgement at the time of writing. In the meantime, Vijitha was unconditionally released on 26 April 2001.

Recommendations

Amnesty International has made several recommendations in its report, including that it should undertake a comprehensive review of the current legal and institutional framework relating to rape in custody to ensure a more effective investigation and prosecution of alleged offenders. The government should send a clear, public message to all security forces personnel emphasizing that rape and other serious sexual violence in custody always constitutes torture and that perpetrators of such offences will be brought to justice and face appropriate penalties, AI recommended.

● CONSCRIPTION OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The following are extracts from a section of the Information Bulletin No 28 dated 1 February 2002 titled "In the Name of 'Peace': Terror Stalks the North-East", by the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR(J):

There is mounting incidence of reports from the East that read like something out of the notorious African slave trade. On the morning of 20th January some distraught parents rushed into Batticaloa from Vavunativu with reports of an LTTE round up to press gang children. The LTTE, these reports said, had appeared around the villages of Kannankudha, Karaikantivu and Thandiyady in the Vavunativu DS Division. A number of children were reported hiding in the undergrowth along the lagoon shore. The LTTE, it is said, subsequently left, taking a number of children along. Earlier, similar reports had come from Pattipalai, Vellavelly and Vaharai.

Such events would seem less a fantasy

if one faces the fact that since August 2001, during the election campaign and afterwards, the LTTE has gone on insisting that each family should contribute a child for its army. The stridency and degree of force have intensified after the cease-fire. In fact around 20th November 2001, the LTTE took about 35 children from the Petthalai area. Six days later, the parents went to Theelivattai across the lagoon from Santhiveli to talk to the LTTE. They were scolded and sent back.

More ironically, the demand that parents must give children to the LTTE has been aired by some TNA candidates during the election campaign. Among them were Vellimalai and Sathyananthan. After the elections, as part of its general campaign, the LTTE wanted Sathyananthan's son in his mid-teens, born to his wife in Kathiraveli, Vaharai. According to local sources, Sathyananthan took his son and went to stay with his second wife in Welikanda.

In the Kiran area the pressure on child recruitment intensified after the elections leading to families moving out of the area. The houses of those who left were broken into by the LTTE, looted and sometimes burnt. About 10th December 2001, the LTTE broke into the houses of the following in Kiran and removed the tiles, for their having quitted without giving a child: 1. Manoharathas, Teacher; 2. Thillainathan, Overseer; 3. Pooranasingam, GM, Kiran Co-op; and 4. Paskaran, Headman (GS).

North of the Batticaloa District being a poor area, the days after the elections saw about 150 young adults joining the LTTE. This was the time there was a rising expectation that the new government would hand over the administration of the North-East to the LTTE, which meant jobs. It seemed that pressure on child recruitment might ease up. This expectation was short-lived. The Government and the LTTE agreed to a cease-fire on 24th December 2001, but for the people there was little to celebrate.

The LTTE moved into towns to freeload from Muslim shops and to extort from Tamils and Muslim civilians alike. In areas along the main road from Valaichenai to Kallar where the LTTE's movements were hitherto inhibited, the LTTE came in and started demanding children and money to set up offices. Where the children were extremely young, the LTTE often demanded a written declaration from the parents that they would give the first child that comes of age – reportedly 12 years. We note that many of the conscripts are in this age group. Those with no children had to pay money. When the people complained to the Army and STF, they were told that the new government would take offence if they tried to stop the LTTE's activities. The best they could do was to offer the people the security of their camps.

In the meantime schools in the rural areas were grinding to a halt as the LTTE's threats and demands on children became more vocal. Families were quitting to Batticaloa Town and Colombo or were keeping their children at home. The LTTE let it be known (e.g. Periya Kallar) that if the parents do not hand over a child by 24th January when the cease-fire was due to end, they would forcibly remove a child and pull out.

In Kiran East, from after the elections, to date, at least 40 houses of people who quit the area have been burnt by the LTTE. Further names of some householders are: Kovinthan, Manoharan, Kanthasamy, Perinpam, Subramaniam, Jeevarathinam and Sinnathurai.

The following persons were forcibly removed from their homes in Kiran East, their ages are given in brackets: 1. Miss. Thevaranjini Selvarajah (28); 2. Miss. Kala Kanthasamy (14); 3. Miss. Dharshini Sundaram (12); 4. Miss. Sutha Kanagaratnam (13); 5. Mas. Kanthan Sinnavan (13); 6. Mas. Kanthasamy Suthaharan (14); 7. Mas. Kanthasamy Kanapathipillai (15) of Kinnaiady

Priyadharshini from Vellavelly was a pupil schooling in Batticaloa Town. Her family had a tragic history, which had prevented her from visiting her village in the LTTE-controlled area for many years. Her elder brother Pararasan had been a member of the TELO when the LTTE launched a murderous attack on it in 1986. Pararasan escaped owing to the clandestine exertions of another sister. Upon finding this out, the LTTE stabbed her to death. Following the much-acclaimed recent cease-fire, Priyadharshini made a journey to Vellavelly. On 19th January 2002, she was abducted by the LTTE.

Another matter of deep concern is just beginning to be talked about. A large number of the LTTE's child deserters are in hiding, some of whom have made it to the mainland. The others are in the wild close to the villages, with their kith and kin secretly taking food to the innocent fugitives in their own land. Sources in the village of Pandariaveli spoke of about 16 deserters in the area. The following were abducted by the LTTE for military service from Munaikkadu, but succeeded in escaping: 1) Mas. Pakiarajah Mithileswaran(16); 2) Mas. Subramanian (16); and 3) Mr.Kanagasabai Raguvaran (18).

The LTTE detained their parents as hostages and released them some days later in late January, apparently after recovering their children. On 23rd January, about 40 children in uniform were brought to Kokkadichcholai by the LTTE. The parents were allowed to talk to them and give them sweetmeats bought from the local shop.

Child abduction in Mutur Area

A similar pattern of child conscription has been in evidence around Mutur in the Trincomalee District. Both in Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts the LTTE has been putting up its own checkpoints close to those of the security forces. Those going into LTTE controlled villages around Mutur are now required to surrender their identity card to the LTTE.

Here too the last few months have seen a high level of child conscription, but more by waylaying them on the streets. The control here is so strong that principals and teachers have been dragooned into giving pep talks to the children urging them to join the LTTE. The following cases, mainly from Senaiyoor and Sambur, during November and December 2001, illustrate the situation in the area. Dozens of children around 13 years old carrying guns can be readily seen in the villages:

Miss. Mythili (15), was caught by the LTTE while returning from school. Her parents who heard about it and rushed to the camp, found that her earrings and books had been taken away. They fought with the LTTE and brought her back home.

The following three were forcibly taken:

Mas. Ramu Mathiyan (12), mother Vellai. The father works as a mason and labourer.

Mas. Lohithan (11), father a farmer.

Mas. Sivan Thangan (16), owned a bullock cart. Was forcibly taken while returning from work in his cart.

More recently, particularly after the cease-fire, nearly everyone has been forced to undergo military training. They have been told that they should be prepared to go to war anytime that they are ordered. The strictness with which this is enforced is illustrated in the case of Ramu (19) of Sambur, who had done his A. Levels. He has been forced to undergo training despite having an artificial leg. ❐

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MATRIMONIAL

35 year old, UK born, Sri Lankan Tamil, Vintage Wine Merchant, house owner *seeks partner, religion immaterial. Please send details. M1281 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu uncle *seeks professional partner for his niece, 25, 5'8", UK permanent resident, optometry graduate working with leading optician. Send horoscope, details. M1282 c/o Tamil Times.*

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent weddings.

Parameswaran *son of late Mr. & Mrs Sivasubramaniam of 5 Amman Road & 65 Palaly Road, Kantharmadam, Jaffna ("Shanmugeswara Akam" 4, Clarendon Gardens, Stone, Dartford, Kent* DA2 6EZ) and **Dr. Kamalam** *daughter of Mr & Mrs Chelliah of 217, W.A.Silva Mawatha, Colombo 6 on 9th December 2001 at Samangodu Manika Pillaiyar Temple, 159, Galle Road, Bambalapitiya, Colombo 4.*

Thayaparan *son of Mr. & Mrs. Paramanathan of 50, Konavalai Road, Kokuvil East, Kokuvil, Jaffna and* **Vijitha** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs.Thirunavukarasu of Gnana Vairavar Veethy, Urumpirai East, Urumpirai, Jaffna on 20th January 2002 at Thurka Mani Mandap am, Nallur, Jaffna.*

OBITUARIES

Dr. K. Kandiah O.B.E.; *former Scientist, Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell; son of late Udayar Kathirgamathamby and wife Annalakshmy of Udayar Valawu, Imayanan, Uddupiddy; beloved husband of Phyllis (Oxford, UK); loving father of Peter (Cayman Island) and Pav (Auckland, New Zealand); brother of late Mrs Swamalakshmi Mailvaganam, Mrs Sawpackiyalakshmi Thirunavukkarasu (Sydney, Australia), late Mrs Thaiyalnayaki Thambiratnam, Mrs Sothilakshmi Kumarasamy (Colombo, Sri Lanka), Mahalakshmi Sivagnanam (Sydney, Australia), Mrs Vijayalakshmi Sivagurunathan (Colombo, Sri Lanka), Mrs Rajalakshmi Baskerasingam (Colombo, Sri Lanka) and Dr. (Mrs.) Jayalakshmi Thevarajah (Madras, India) passed away on 21st January 2002 in Oxford and the funeral was held on 30 January in Oxfordshire, UK*

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in various ways during the period of bereavement. Mrs P. Kandiah, 13, Tullis Close, Sutton Courtenay, Abingdon, Oxfordshire 0X14 4BD.

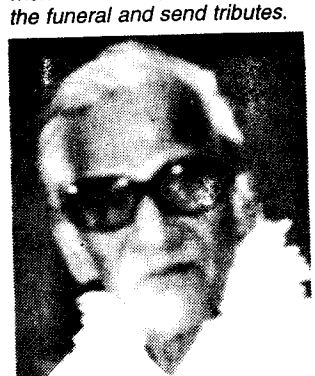
Mr. Thanabalasingham Pararajasingham; *retired Superintendent of Stores, Irrigation Department, Ratmalana; dearly beloved husband of late Sivagamasoundaram; dearest elder brother of late Kulothungam, late Mrs Vallinachchiar Sivarajah and of Mrs Manonmany Foot; brother-in-law of late Mrs Mankayatkarasi Arumainayagam; loving father of Balasinghan, Balayohini, Varothayasingham and Srimalini; loving father-in-law of Mahadevan, Mahaluxumy and Girija; dearest grandfather of Mayurathy, Jananie, Keerthi and Smuruthi; loving uncle of Sivakumaran, Shasikala, Kothandapani and Shanthi; dearest great uncle of Narmatha, Krishna, Luxshman, Sanjeev and Anuslika and beloved great grandfather of Shivanya and Arun passed away peacefully on 20th January 2002 at the age of 91 years. His last rites were performed on 28 January 2002 by Swami Chaithanyanantha of Sri Rajarajeswari Peetham, Rochester, New York, USA followed by cremation at North East Surrey Crematorium, Morden.*

His children and families wish to thank all friends and relatives who shared in their grief in person and by messages of condolence and helped in various ways.

In loving memory of **Mrs Sivagamasoundaram Pararajasingham**, *on the fourth anniversary of her passing away on 5 February 1998, reunited with Aiyah on 20 January 2002. We are ever so grateful to the almighty for granting us the gift of your great love, affection and guidance for so long. Fondly remembered and deeply missed by children, in-laws, grandchildren, great grandchildren, nephews and nieces. - 285 Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6AH. Tel: 0208 949 1944.*

Mrs Annaratnam Subramaniam; *daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Kanagasabai of Araly East; beloved wife of the late C. Subramaniam (Orator); loving mother of Kanthaswamy, Gnanaranjini, Pathmasany, Chitsabesan and Dr.Vasanthan; mother-in-law of Malini, Dr. Puvanarajan, late Dr. Kandiah, Kumudini and Dr. Premilla; dearest grandmother of Janani, Waani, Senthuran, Yaamini, Lohita, Praneeta, Dr.Thayalan, Dr. Anjali, Mahen, Mithran, Lakshman and Rishi and loving sister of late Pavalarmnah, late Rasapackiam and the late Navaratnarajah passed away on 15.01.02 in Hartlepool, UK. The cremation took place on 20.01.02 in London.*

The members of the family wish to thank all, who attended the funeral and send tributes.



Mr. C. Subramaniam *(Orator), Retired Principal, Skanda Varodaya College.*

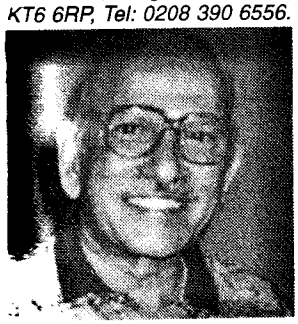
On the eighth anniversary of your passing away and your reunion with Amma, we fondly recall countless memories of the unparalleled love and affection, you both showered on us.

Remembered by children, in-laws and grandchildren - 29 Mountston Close, Hartlepool, T526 OLR.

(23.08.1913 - 21.01.2002)

Mr. Rasiah Kandiah, *Retired Principal, Kokuvil Ramakrishna Saiva Vidyalayam and Navatkuli Maha Vidyalayam; former President, All Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union and Gandhiya Seva Sangam; beloved husband of retired teacher Somamma; loving father of Ravindren (Sri Lanka), Umarani, Narendran, Sucindran (all of London), Nanthini (South Africa) and Kamalini (Canada); father-in-law of Geetha, Nitkunan, Dushyanthini, Aruna, Mahesan and Kumeranthran; grandfather of Dr. Ananthahi, Dr. Arani, Dr. Tharani, Sudharshana, Priyadharshana, Piranavan, Brintha, Mayuriga, Yalini, Mayurathan, Hariharan and Vithiya passed away in Colombo on 21st January 2002 and was cremated on 24th January at Kanatta Cemetary in Colombo, Sri Lanka.*

The family wish to thank relatives and friends for their messages of sympathy and support during this period of grief. – K. Sucindran, 5 Lower Sand Hills, Long Ditton, Surrey KT6 6RP, Tel: 0208 390 6556.



Mr Paramalingam Ponnampalam, *(Retired Education Department Examination Officer, Colombo), born 8.4.1932, beloved husband of Mahildevi (retired teacher Uduvil Girls College, HFC Colombo, St. Mary's Lesotho & Transkei); loving father of Niranjan, Nithiya and Nimie passed away and the funeral took place in Canada.*

The family thank all relatives and friends for messages of sympathy and support during the period of great sorrow.– Ponnampalam, 28 Frontier Pathway, Toronto, Canada M1B 4G4. Tel: 416-287- 2092

Dr. John St. George, *F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G. passed away in Sydney on 9th December 2001 aged 76 years. Educated at St. Patrick's College, Jaffna and Colombo Medical College, he was Consultant Gynaecologist and Obstetrician in Colombo and Jaffna, Sri Lanka; London, North Nigeria, Trinidad and Sydney. He is survived by his wife, Ingrid Selvaranee; daughters Dr. Lourdes White, Geraldine St. George and Mrs Marian Emmanuel; sons Dr. S. Bernard and Nimal St. George; daughter-in-law Dr. Usha St. George; sons-in-law Spencer White and Dr. J.R.P. Emmanuel; four grandsons and four granddaughters.*

After a Requiem Holy Mass his remains were interned in Sydney, Australia on 12th December.

Fifth Death Anniversary
Mohanadas. K. Samuel
(18.1.35 - 4.2.97)

Nothing loved is ever lost
Memories last for ever

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by wife Utaiwan, children Monti, Manee and Mike; son-in- law Allan, grandson Nicolas, mother Rasamanie, sister Chandra; brothers Indran and Peter and their families.

Third Death Anniversary
10.02.2002
Mrs Regina Rajanayagam

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved husband Rajanayagam; brothers Ratnam, Jesudasan, Anton James and Prince; sister Cecilia Lawrence; brothers-in-law Dr.Arasaratnam and Nadarajah; sisters-in-law Mrs Anula Arasaratnam, Mrs Parames Selvaratnam and Mrs Mahes Sivayoganathan; niece Shamini and nephew Anton. –13, Arbuthnot Lane, Bexley, Kent DA5 1EH

Fourth Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mrs Pakiaratanam Kandiah** *on the fourth anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998.*

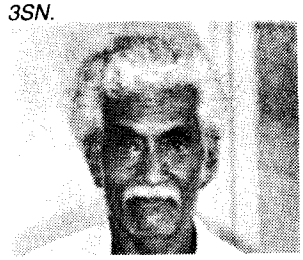
Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her only sister Mrs Parimalaratam Thirunavukarasu of Yogaswami's Abode, Colombuthurai, Sri Lanka; children Sivayogaratnam, Sivayoganathan, Sivayogeswary, Sivayogaiswaran and Sivayogan; sons-in-law Varatharajah and Sivathasan; daughters-in-law Umasakthy, Sivayogi and Arnirthavalli; several grandchildren and great grandchildren. – 3, New Leasow, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham B76 IYL.

IN MEMORIAM

In ever-loving memory of **Dr. Kandiah Nadesalingam** *(from Urumpirai and of 'Arnbika Bhavan', Palaly Road, Thirunelvely, Sri Lanka) on the 6th month of his passing away on 10.8.2001.*

'You are my treasure and you are in my heart and thoughts always – Babiya'

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Babiya & family and his sisters and families. 28, Princes Avenue, Roath, Cardiff CF24 3SN.



In loving memory of **Mr. Canagaratnam Balendra** on *the second anniversary of his passing away on 18th February 2000.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Parameswari; loving daughters Balini, Anushia and Damayanthi; sons-in-law Chelvayogan, Balendran and Sivamohan; grandchildren Gomathie, Meena, Athavan and Anjali – 4732 Scenic View Road, Lexington, Kentucky 40514, USA.

The third anniversary of the passing away of **Mrs Sakthiamma Kanaganayagam,** *wife of the late Senator S.R.Kanaganayagam falls on 27st February 2002.*

She is remembered with deep

love and affection by her children, their families, nephews, nieces and a wide circle of friends. - 12, Fitzwilliam Road, Vaucluse, N5W2030, Australia.

In loving memory of **Mr. Chelliah Sivasampu** *on the tenth anniversary of his passing away on 9 March 1992.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his two sons.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Mar 2 *Sankadakara Sathuthi; 6.45 p.m. Tamil Orphans Trust presents Vocal Concert, Bharatha Natyam & Dance Drama.*

Tel: 020 8908 1101/8204 3163/8422 3943;

South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in.

Tel: 020 8542 3285

Mar 4 *Feast of St.Casimir*

Mar 8 *Feast of St. John of God*

Mar 9 *Krishna Eekathasi; Feast of St. Francis of Rome*

Mar 11 *Pirathosam; Maha Sivaraththiri*

Mar 13 *Amavasai*

Mar 16 *SLTWG Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285*

Mar17 *Sathurthi; Feast of St. Patrick, Patron of Ireland*

Mar18 *Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem*

Mar 19 *Shashti; Karthigai; Feast of St. Joseph*

Mar 23 *Feast of St. Turibius*

Mar 25 *Sukkla Eekathasi; 11a.m. Colombuthurai Yoga Swamigal Abhisekham &Guru Poojah followed by Prasatham at Sree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London 5W19. All Welcome;*

Feast of The Annunciation of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Mar 28 *Full Moon; Pankuni Uththiram*

Mar 30 *SLTWG In. Tel: 020 542 3285*

Mar 31 *Sathurthi*

At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7381 3086/4608

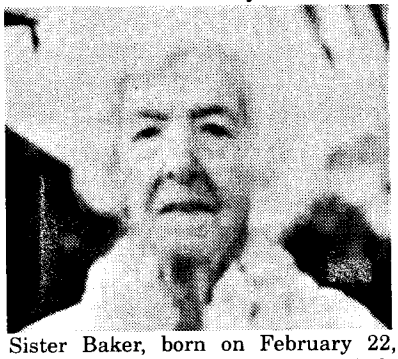
Mar 12 *7.30 p.m. Maha Shivaratri Celebrations with Abhishekam, Bhajans, traditional puja and prasad. All welcome.*

Mar 17 *7 p.m. Bhinna Abhinna – Separate yet one*

Mar 23 *6.30 p.m. Holy Festival rejoiced with Music & Dances.*

Website: *www.bhavan.net*
E-mail: *info@bhavam.net*

Sister Elizabeth Baker – Birth Centenary Tribute



Sister Baker, born on February 22, 1902 in the village of Thornton Le Dale in Yorkshire, UK was the youngest in a family of four girls and a boy. After her education at the local grammar and Methodist boarding schools, she was trained as a deaconess and was ordained in 1930.

She was trained in Manchester and Suffolk and in 1931 was attached to the missionary centre in Selly Oaks, Birmingham when she offered her services to work as a missionary overseas. She arrived in Ceylon on August 25, 1931 and was sent to Eastern Province to start her missionary career.

Sister Baker spent three years in Kalmunai during which period, she was the acting Principal of the Kalmunai Girls Boarding school and afterwards, between 1934-36, was attached to the Deaconess Training School in Puttur in the peninsula. She returned to Eastern Province and after being there for 16 years she came back to Puttur in 1952 to take charge of' Arokya Vasam'.

While there she started 'Wilson Nursery', a home for children of TB afflicted mothers, organised Girl Guides Companies in the North and East and an association for the prevention of TB, assisted in rehabilitation work for the flood victims in the Eastern province before retirement after almost thirty years of active service.

Sister Baker's retirement as a Methodist missionary was not the end of her life of love and service to the people of Sri Lanka. She had grown to love our country and our people and decided to adopt Sri Lanka as her home. This decision brought the birth of a new organisation called **"Navajeevanam"** for service and sacrifice. Together with late Rev. A.C.Thambyrajah and Mrs Arul Thambyrajah, Sister Baker moved into a new colonisation in Paranthan and started Navajeevanam.

It was their dream which became a reality by the Grace of God. The late Bishop Kulendran of the Jaftha Diocese of the Church of South India commented that this source and centre of hope has not only been a home of refuge but also provides shelter and remakes most of them. Late Bishop Wickramasinghe of the Anglican Diocese of Kurunagala characterised it as a venture of Faith and Love.

Sister Baker having lived and worked in Tamil areas became well versed in the language and culture of the Tamils. She read, wrote, spoke and sang in Tamil at ease and was always dressed in a white saree. She was very comfortable and enjoyed eating food using fingers like any other Tamil. and enjoyed drinking rasam from the plate.

She enjoyed doing gardening and moved around the village on her bicycle. She was the nursery teacher at the children's centre, English teacher, counsellor for women, an emergency midwife and was affectionately called 'white amma' or 'cycle amma'.

In recognition of her valuable services, she was honoured with an M.B.E. by Her Majesty, the Queen in 1974 and the British High Commissioner in Sri Lanka travelled all the way to Murasumoddai and presented the award in the midst of a large number of villagers. In the mid 80's her health began to deteriorating and after ailing for some time she died peacefully on July 1, 1987 and had a very well attended funeral at Navajeevanam

Navajeevanam continued her work true to the spirit of its motto, 'Ready for both service and sacrifice'. The civil war in Sri Lanka came unto the doors of Navajeevanam that accommodated hundreds of refugees and they had to be evacuated further interior to Tharmapuram. The entire buildings, equipments, fixtures were removed wholesale or damaged. This includes the Holy Carpenter Church. Since 1995, the place that was full of life has become a desert.

It is hoped that when the situation gets to normal, it would be possible to rebuild Navajeevanam at the original site. This is the best the Navajeevanam Family and the supporters can do when we commemorate the Birth Centenary of the founder Sister Elizabeth Baker.

Navajeevanam, Paranthan, Sri Lanka. (Email - preml@shaw.ca)

Dr. John St. George An Appreciation

It gives us great pleasure to reminisce and recount the multifaceted qualities of Dr. John St. George, great in his own inimitable way and in the way of the speedily developing world. He was born on 2 December 1924, the third son of

Mr. & Mrs Samuel St. George, spent his early childhood in his mother's hometown, Atchuvely and started his early education there. In 1932, he entered St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, which was then under the tutelage of the famous Rev. Fathers Timothy Long and Charles Mathews, two stalwarts who had the inspiration, charisma and courage to mould the young minds of that period to aspire to great heights of academic excellence and noble manhood.

In his early years at St. Patrick's, he showed his brilliance in studies and sports – especially soccer. Needless to say, he was captain for Athletics and Sports. He obtained many distinctions in the college and national examinations and entered the Colombo Medical College in 1943. Here too, his outstanding ability in medical studies and his competence in the field of sports were evident. As captain, it was his proud privilege to lead the First University Soccer Team to participate in the InterUniversity Soccer Tournament held in India.

John graduated from the Medical College with Second Class Honours and distinctions in subjects related to those in which he specialised later. He passed the primary surgical examination and went to England on a three year scholarship to study Obstetrics and Gynaecology. After obtaining the F.R.C.O.G. and F.R.C.S., he was proud of being posted to his home province, Jaffna. His dedication and untiring commitment to his work combined with compassion towards those with limited means, were appreciated by one and all. He was not only a good doctor but also a humanitarian who was prepared to dispense his services without any payment from his patients. He received in ample measure their gratitude and saw their faces lit up when he had alleviated their suffering and gave the welcome news of a healthy new born babe in their arms.

Later on, he worked in the northern provinces of Nigeria. His work here helped many women who had not received any specialised treatment earlier. In 1967, he was invited by the University of West Indies to set up the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology. This was as a result of the valuable paper he had submitted in this field on improvements he had effected in operative techniques. He accepted this post in Trinidad and his work there brought out his administrative capabilities and was seen as a beacon light to attract many medical students from neighbouring areas. After a short second spell in Nigeria he moved to Australia and was Director of the Royal Women's Hospital in Brisbane, from where he went to Sydney, where he lived till his death. He established his private practice and several patients thronged his surgery. When the political situation in Sri Lanka deteriorated, many Tamils who left the country chose Australia as a safe haven. These persons and those of his extended family, he helped immensely by sponsoring and assisting them to begin a new life in a new land.

John was a true son of Atchuvely. He held his hometown, parents and family in high respect and regard even though he was not living there. He was an ardent devotee of St. Joseph's Church in Atchuvely and was a regular contributor financially for its upkeep and maintenance. He was a sincere Catholic not only in attending Sunday Masses regularly, but also as one who practised his religion.

May God, in His Infinite Wisdom and Mercy give him Eternal Joy in his Heavenly Kingdom.

Two good friends from London

Bishop B. Deogupillai

It was ten years ago that the Diocese of Jaffna joyously celebrated the Triple Jubilee of Bishop B. Deogupillai, observing the 75th year of his birth, 50th year of priesthood and the 25th year of his Episcopate, thus ending a golden era of his active Pastorship in the Church of the North and East.

His health has been gradually declining and presently he is mostly confined to his bed. He is enriching the Church through his bed of pain and physical sufferings that have become his daily offering to the Crucified Lord.

Bishop Deogupillai inherited his love for the Tamil Language and especially for the folklore of Catholic Literature, Ammanais and Nadagams, etc. and developed and fostered these to grow unhampered, encouraging all works of this nature. His contributions in these fields have been well recognized at the national level.

He served with distinction mostly in the field of education in the Diocese as Principal of Sacred Reart College, Karaveddy, St. Joseph's Anuradhapura, St. Henry's Ilavalai and St. Joseph's Teacher's Training College, Colombagam, Jaffna. While serving as the Parish Priest of St. Anne's, Ilavalai, as well as the District Dean, he was nominated Auxiliary Bishop of Trinco/Batticaba to H L Bishop Ignetius Glenni S. J. Thereafter he took the reins of the Diocese of Jaffna on January 9, 1973 as the First Diocesan Bishop of Jaffna. During the period as chief shepherd there has been remarkable growth of the Church of the North in many fields. It was to his credit that the Diocese of Mannar became a reality and the Vicariate of Anuradhapura was created to be Diocese. The second decade of his twenty years as Bishop of Jaffna he faced the painful and turbulent years in many ways. He braved this period with extraordinary courage, wisdom and tenacity.

He founded the St. Francis Xavier's Major Seminary out of dire necessity that arose from the ethnic conflict in the country, to safeguard the interest of the Church in the North. Now it has grown and developed into a well established Major Seminary comparable to any such institutions. He was thus able to promote the growth of the Diocesan Clergy nearly fulfilling the needs of the Diocese.

In order to encourage the Tamil Catholic writers and to reprint and re-edit ancient Catholic publications, he founded the Tamil Catholic Literature Society. Those who know him well and have been close to him will attest to the Grand Old Gentlemen that he is an amiable and remarkable personality and acclaim him as a leading light to the Northern Church.

May the God Lord bless him with peaceful retirement! Glory to God alone!

- By John Amaratunga - Minister of Interior

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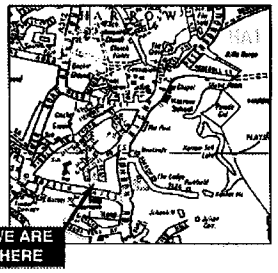

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